

The Course of Conflict
A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricœur

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À minha avó, ao meu tio e ao meu irmão.

À Marta, como sempre. A todos eles. Por tudo.

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Paul Ricœur was a voracious reader. Anyone that finds him or herself in the position of writing a doctoral thesis on Ricœur's thought can therefore very easily fall into the temptation of trying to read everything he read, everything he wrote and maybe even almost everything that has been written on his philosophy. It is self-evident how merciless and long, if not endless, that task can become.

Fortunately I have had the chance of counting on the help and direction of many a renowned and experienced Ricoeurian scholar, as well as many other colleagues and friends. By virtue of that same chance, the research that led to the writing of this thesis, and that spanned for six long years was an eventful and fertile period in Ricoeurian studies. Ricœur died in 2005. By 2010 the effort of many individuals and institutions led to the inauguration of the Fonds Ricœur at the site of the Institut Protestant de Théologie in Paris, which was followed by the creation of the Association Paul Ricœur in 2011. Since Ricœur's demise a host of other scholarly networks has been created, such as the Society for Ricœur Studies (based in North America and gathering English speaking Ricoeurian scholars) and more recently the ASIER (Associação Ibero-Americana de Estudos sobre Paul Ricœur), whose membership is constituted by Portuguese and Spanish speaking scholars.

The obvious result of all this enthusiasm and networking around the work of this great French philosopher was a prolific activity consisting in several conferences and publications in many different languages, leading up to the climax of 2013, the year in which we celebrated the centenary of Ricœur. As my research for this thesis started in 2008 and culminated in 2014 and because I have had the honor of serving on both the board of directors of the Society for Ricœur Studies and the ASIER, as well as the opportunity to co-host one of the yearly international conferences in Europe (Lisbon, 2010) and to participate in literally more than a dozen conferences dedicated to Ricœur during this period of time, the research and writing of the thesis coincided and was nourished by the interaction with many people over this stretch of time. Even though I cannot mention them all, I wish to thank every individual who has given me an opinion on papers

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Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Philosophy and Social Criticism, Philosophy Today and *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra*. I thank the editors of *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* for their permission to partially republish here a few sections of some of the articles previously published there.

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ABSTRACT

In this dissertation I undertake a conceptual clarification, as well as a historical reconstruction of the notion of conflict in philosophy. I start by analyzing the intrinsically conflictual intellectual landscape of the Greek source (in Homer, Heraclitus, Greek Tragedy, Plato and the Greek public sphere) move on to see what forms conflict assumes in Modern philosophy (mainly in Kant, Hegel and Marx) and sketch a cartography of the contemporary reappraisal of this notion in contemporaneity, mainly by discussing Critical Theory (Habermas, Honneth, Hunyadi), pragmatic sociology (Boltanski, Thévenot) and Anglo-Saxon political philosophy (Rawls, Walzer, Taylor) among other meaningful contributions. These introductory parts of the dissertation lead up to an appraisal of the way in which conflict appears in the works of French philosopher Paul Ricœur, in what I call a “course of conflict” in his thought.

My aim is twofold: firstly, to argue that conflict is indeed a touchstone not only of Ricœur’s works, but also of a very important number of authors in the history of philosophy; secondly, that a reappraisal of this notion is necessary in the contemporary debate, and that Paul Ricœur offers very nuanced, supple and plural accounts which can be useful in this reappraisal. The “course of conflict” is thus divided in three main parts, encompassing “existential”, “hermeneutic” and “practical” conflicts and throughout the dissertation many topics are discussed, dealing with disciplines such as hermeneutics, psychoanalysis and practical philosophy (ethics, political philosophy and social philosophy).

I ultimately argue that conflict is ineluctable in philosophy as in life, but that it does not necessarily amount to a strictly negative phenomenon; sometimes, conflicts can be creative and positive. Nonetheless, accepting this also means that the recognition of conflicts is intrinsically connected with the search for solutions for them, ways to deal and negotiate them, make them creative and positive. But in order to see how these procedures work, the dissertation puts forward a typology of different types of conflict, as well as ways to mediate, conciliate or, in some cases, just accepting and multiplying them, in a case-by-case scenario.

In the last parts of the dissertation, and taking as a starting point the analyses of Ricœur and the perspectives of the other authors presented before, I spell out the project of a hermeneutic social philosophy and claim that in our own day and age what is called for is a new critique of reason, which I decide to call a “critique of miserable reason”, one that would be able to rethink the social world in other terms, trying to avoid the pitfalls of reductionism in its many forms.

KEYWORDS: Conflict, Kant, Hermeneutics, Ricœur, Social Philosophy

RESUMO

Esta tese leva a cabo uma clarificação conceptual e uma reconstrução histórica da noção de conflito, tal como ela aparece na filosofia. Num primeiro momento, analisa-se o fenómeno do conflito na fonte Grega (em Homero, Heraclito, Platão, nas tragédias gregas e nas formas de interação agonística no espaço público) e na filosofia moderna (principalmente em Kant, Hegel e Marx). Num segundo momento, estabelece-se, nos seus traços gerais, uma cartografia da recuperação desta noção na contemporaneidade através da discussão das contribuições provenientes da teoria crítica (Habermas, Honneth, Hunyadi), da sociologia pragmática (Boltanski, Thévenot) e da filosofia política anglo-saxónica (Rawls, Walzer, Taylor), entre outras. Estas partes iniciais da tese desembocam numa análise aprofundada da obra do filósofo francês Paul Ricœur e das muitas instanciações do conflito nessa obra, naquilo a que chamo o “percurso do conflito” no pensamento de Ricœur.

Neste “percurso do conflito” o objetivo é duplo: por um lado, provar que o conflito é a pedra de toque não só da filosofia de Ricœur, mas também de um grande conjunto de outros autores; por outro lado, que é necessário reavaliar o papel desta noção no debate contemporâneo e que nesse contexto a filosofia de Ricœur e as suas análises finas e plurais podem ser de uma grande utilidade. Assim sendo, este “percurso do conflito” divide-se em três partes, as quais lidam com diferentes tipos de conflito: conflitos “existenciais”, “hermenêuticos” e “práticos”. Ao longo destas partes, várias disciplinas são chamadas à colação, como a hermenêutica, a psicanálise e a filosofia prática (ética, filosofia política e filosofia social), numa tentativa de esclarecer os diferentes fenómenos em causa.

Em última instância, chega-se à conclusão que o conflito é inevitável em filosofia, tal como na vida, mas que este não é (pelo menos não em todas as suas formas e instanciações) um fenómeno estritamente negativo; por vezes, os conflitos podem ser criativos e positivos. Porém, aceitar este facto implica igualmente consentir que o reconhecimento dos conflitos está intrinsecamente ligado à busca de soluções para eles, formas de lidar com eles e torná-los criativos e positivos. Para que possa ser compreendido, em traços gerais, como é que estes procedimentos funcionam, esta tese elabora uma tipologia de diferentes tipos de conflito e respetivas formas de lidar com eles, mediando-os, conciliando-os ou, nalguns casos, apenas aceitando a sua existência e mesmo multiplicando-os. A busca da melhor solução tem sempre de ser operada caso a caso.

Nas partes finais da tese, e partindo das análises de Ricœur e dos outros autores apresentadas ao longo da mesma, delineia-se o projeto de uma filosofia social hermenêutica e argumenta-se que aquilo de que precisamos hoje em dia é de uma nova crítica da razão, uma “crítica da razão miserável” que possa repensar o mundo social em novos termos e que, ao fazê-lo, possa evitar os perigos do reducionismo nas suas múltiplas formas.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Conflito, Filosofia Social, Kant, Hermenêutica, Ricœur

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War is father of all and the king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free.

(Heraclitus, Fragment LXXXIII Kahn, p. 207)

Even stars collide, and out of their crashing new worlds are born.

(“As I began to love myself”. Poem attributed to Charlie Chaplin)

There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival “knowing”; the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our “concept” of the thing, our “objectivity”.

(Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, III, §12, p. 87.)

Le négatif est toujours le défi. Mais le fond de l'existence est le pouvoir de dire oui. (...) l'avenir est ouvert. Nous avons toujours besoin de penser la terre promise car nous ne pourrions penser le conflit si nous ne pensions pas la réconciliation. Nous portons un projet de réconciliation mais non monnayable en institution réelle. C'est la place de l'imaginaire social. (...) je sais où je me tiens. Je ne suis pas dans un vide supérieur, précisément parce que je nie qu'il y a un point de vue supérieur qui engloberait toutes les contradictions. Ici, je me tiens.

(Ricœur, Interview with Olivier Abel, *Présence Protestante* (1991), quoted by Dosse, *Les sens d'une vie*, p. 604)

Prologue

Paul Ricœur and 20th Century Philosophy

Paul Ricœur incarnated the spirit of his time. One could say that the corpus of his works acts as a mirror of the philosophical questions and problems of the whole 20th century. Actually, were the Philosophy of the past century to be granted the status of a conceptual character – much like Nietzsche's or Kierkegaard's conceptual characters – capable of making its own self-presentation in a narrative manner and depicting its own life, inner contradictions and metamorphoses commanded by the interactions with its Others (whether it is religion, psychoanalysis, literature or the human and social sciences we are talking about) we might very well find the main episodes of this narrative in Ricœur's own *oeuvre*.

This is not to say that Paul Ricœur is nothing more than a historian of Philosophy or that his main contribution to the “history of ideas” consists in providing a complex but coherent “synthesis” of 20th century philosophy. If this were to be the case, nothing would compel us to read his books besides the possibility of finding good introductions to other philosophers or philosophical movements. Rather, as I will argue throughout this thesis, his philosophy is characterized by what we could call an “informed original thinking”, enriched by the many readings and philosophical standpoints that pervade his works, but never neglecting to *rethink* them through, to discuss and appropriate them into his own *enlarged* standpoint.

Many could have written a history of 20th century philosophy. But few could have found the similarities and the differences between so many different theories, established the relevant connections among them and drawn the frontiers at the points in which no meaningful contact could be established. And surely no other philosopher used this creative mixture of contexts to redefine and rewrite philosophy in his own way.

As someone who started publishing at a time when the most relevant philosophers in France were Sartre and Merleau-Ponty and who managed to outlive Lacan, Foucault and even his friend and onetime assistant Derrida,

someone who took part in almost every major philosophical debate of his time, from the heated discussions with Lévi-Strauss, Lacan and Greimas, to the open-minded and cooler interaction with the domains of historiography, literary theory and religious studies, Paul Ricœur occupies a very particular place in the history of philosophy in the last century.

This attentiveness and respect for the perspective stemming from the other was probably due to his peculiar notion of truth, which we will analyze in detail further on. Ultimately, as Charles Reagan puts it, Ricœur was driven by the belief that “virtually every philosopher, ancient, modern, or contemporary, has seen a piece of the truth.”¹ His immense erudition and his constant attitude of self-effacement, often enrolling other authors to the immense play of his philosophical *oeuvre* in the making, never assuming a theory as his own if credit could be granted to others, results in a complex theoretical construction, one full of detours and delayed continuities. In Ricœur’s own words: “Detour/return is the rhythm of my philosophical respiration”.²

This erudition and complex maze of interacting perspectives means that one can read Ricœur’s books – and, to a minor extent, in a modest way, some parts of this thesis insofar as it touches upon almost the entirety of his production – as an introduction to many of the philosophical key figures and topics of the 20th century but also, and perhaps more importantly, that Ricœur’s interventions and theoretical contributions not only formed several generations of philosophers, not only helped to establish the philosophical coordinates of the last century, but also contributed to transform it and to set the tone for some of the major debates we are witnessing in our own day.³

It is well known that in spite of his contribution to many schools of thought and movements it was probably through his renewal of hermeneutics that Ricœur became famous. And it is also clear that one of the main features of his particular strand of hermeneutics consists in the equilibrium between tradition and

¹ Charles Reagan, *Paul Ricœur. His life and his work* (Chicago/London: University of Chicago Press, 1996), p. 74.

² Interview with Charles Reagan, July 4th 1991, republished in *Paul Ricœur his life and work, op. cit.*, p. 133.

³ For instance, the debate about life and the living [*vivant*] that is taking place in France and elsewhere. See Frédéric Worms “Paul Ricœur entre la vie et le mal ou les coordonnées philosophiques du siècle” in *La Philosophie en France au XXème siècle* (Paris: Gallimard, 2009), pp. 530-549.

innovation, belonging, distanciation and appropriation. As we will see throughout this thesis, one constant characteristic of his was the tireless reworking of certain topics and the obsessive search for new theoretical grounds to explore. Up until Ricœur's death, his was an open-ended philosophical exploration. Every new book could bring both a surprise and a major new contribution to a given philosophical field. With his demise, in a way, the corpus is now closed.

But it is also, up to a certain point, open, *in fieri*, because Ricœur emphasized the role of the “engaged reader” in the making of the meaning of a text as well. Ultimately, every text is written to be read and without that reading it will remain incomplete. Philosophical research as well is constitutively incomplete but insofar as philosophy is made up of events in language that acquire their stability through the fixation in texts, and since the provisional meaning of these texts is only constituted in the reception they have by their readers, there are certainly many ways in which Ricoeurian philosophy is meaningful today, through the actual signification imposed on it by their readers.

Consequently, this thesis is yet another exercise of *reading Ricœur once again*, in order that a certain rational reconstruction of his philosophy can take place, one that tries to be both informative and more than a mere repetition of its content. Rather, it tries to discuss some of its main claims, to make clear how and why Ricœur arrived at them but also in which ways he could have made other choices and how we can think the same problems differently.

This and all similar attempts – that is: all discussion of his philosophy that at the same time aims to use his analyzes in order to move beyond them at some point and *think more* – are, in my view, the best homages we can pay to Paul Ricœur, one of the greatest philosophers of the 20th century.

Introduction

Any reader, however vaguely acquainted with the works of Paul Ricœur, will most likely find that the title of this thesis has a familiar ring to it. As the reader has by this time certainly found out, the inspiration for it comes from Ricœur's last book published during his lifetime, *The Course of Recognition*⁴, which is, in many respects, one of his most important works and the one book that shows the final stage of his philosophical anthropology.

As Ricœur states right at the outset of this book, in page X of his preface, *The Course of Recognition* is born of a “wager”, namely that “it is possible to confer on the sequence of known philosophical occurrences of the word recognition the coherence of a rule-governed polysemy”. With this effort, Ricœur aims to fill a gap in the history of philosophy, namely, to provide a concrete and substantial grounding to the notion of recognition in philosophy, one that would be able to unify the scattered occurrences of this word under a given course [*parcours*]. Ricœur says course, rather than “theory” because he is well aware that nothing allows him to say that such different philosophical notions as Kant's *Rekognition* (the third synthesis in the *Critique of Pure Reason*⁵) or Hegel's *Anerkennung* will fit exactly under the same umbrella. But this does not mean that recognition does not play a role in philosophy, nor that we cannot make sense of it; that is, to find the similarities and differences between the different contexts in which it appears; to, as a good dialectician, “cut up each kind [of speech] according to its species”⁶, as Plato would put it.

Correspondingly, my wager, reciprocal to that of Ricœur, is that we can also find a course of another notion, that of *conflict*, not only in the history of philosophy itself but particularly in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur. Therefore this is a twofold wager: firstly, my claim is that this is one of the fundamental notions of Ricœur's philosophy, maybe even *the* key methodological notion that animates his philosophy. I am not alone in this wager, as many other interpreters chose to

⁴ Paul Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, translated by David Pellauer (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 2005).

⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated and edited by Paul Guyer and Allen W. Wood (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

⁶ *Phaedrus* 265e, translation by Alexander Nehamas and Paul Woodruff in Plato, *Complete Works*, ed. by John Cooper and D. S. Hutchinson (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997).

follow similar interpretative paths prior to myself.⁷ However, evidence must be provided to support this claim. And this brings me to the second aspect of the wager: that the notion of conflict is subject to many semantic nuances throughout the work of Paul Ricœur and that it belongs to a web of interconnected concepts whose semantic field we will have to determine. On the one hand, we are speaking of different things if we speak of a conflict of interpretations in hermeneutics or a conflict of duties in the context of a practical philosophy. On the other hand, conflict is incomprehensible if we do not define it with the aid of other concepts, such as dialectics, conciliation, and mediation, to name only a few. I will try to show in later chapters how this web of interconnected concepts is formed; in so doing, this dissertation will be operating a semantic analysis with practical import.

The result of this approach is that this thesis will affirm the primacy of the notion of conflict in the work of Ricœur, showing how it is animated by the dynamics of antithesis, but whose significance will be determined on a case-by-case basis. Thus we will follow the course of conflict and treat each of its stages as if they were philosophical figures. Once we start following the footsteps of these particular instantiations of conflict we will find that there is a certain productive circularity in the movement, because conflict will reveal itself, first and foremost, in the domain of human existence and praxis, and it will be precisely to the domain of human action that it will return in the end, but not without having made the long detour through the domain of language. By having traversed this domain, conflict will have forced human existence to follow a difficult path of self-interpretation, showing it its limits in a rather negative way.

However, retracing this course in the works of Ricœur and thereby going through most of his published works, would be difficult without a preparatory

⁷ In choosing this topic, I am certainly being influenced by a community of reading, namely, the community of Ricœur studies in my country of origin, Portugal. Thus the wager is supported by a whole history of interpretation which precedes me. Amid this *Wirkungsgeschichte*, I am particularly indebted to the emphasis on conflict put forward by Maria Luísa Portocarrero and Fernanda Henriques. Portocarrero has emphasized very early on the significance and importance of Ricœur's conflictual hermeneutics. See Maria Luísa Portocarrero da Silva, *A Hermenêutica do Conflito em Paul Ricœur* (Coimbra: Minerva, 1992). Fernanda Henriques went further, by insisting that conflict was the overall key to Ricœur's work. See Fernanda Henriques, "A esperança escatológica e o conflito de interpretações" in *A Filosofia de Paul Ricœur*, edited by Fernanda Henriques (Coimbra: Ariadne, 2006), pp. 109-114. Olivier Abel, for his part, has come up with a similar notion to characterize a particular part of Ricœur's philosophy. Concerning his theory of history, he speaks about the "unsurpassable dissensus". See Olivier Abel, "The Unsurpassable Dissensus" in *Between Description and Interpretation. The hermeneutic turn in phenomenology*, edited by Andrzej Wiercinski (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2005).

exposition of other accounts of conflict given by different authors, both in the history of philosophy and in Ricœur's own contemporaneity. Therefore, what I properly call "the course of conflict" corresponds to parts three, four and five of this dissertation, namely, the existential conflict, the hermeneutic conflict and the practical conflict. These three broad titles seem to me to encompass the three main "stages" of the concept of conflict in Ricœur's philosophy, and their arrangement in this order allows me to follow a rough diachronic approach, following Ricœur's footsteps as his philosophy was unfolding. Each of these parts has an introduction, and in the introductions (or sometimes in the main sections of each chapter as well) I sometimes fall into the temptation of including historical or biographical accounts of Ricœur's own life, in order to provide a clearer picture of why such and such a topic appeared in his philosophy. There is, of course, a danger of falling back into some sort of psychologism or, even worse, a mild determinism with this method, but as I understand it, I avoid the pitfalls of both these dangers. The historical details, which are brief, are there to provide a background picture of the development of Ricœur's work and, therefore, of his take on conflict. Certainly, the work underwent many changes in spite of Ricœur's plans and intentions (so we can not attribute the meaning of his work to his alleged motives) and neither did the events of his life absolutely determine the trajectory of his philosophy. However, somewhere in this particular mix between intentions, long-term plans and unexpected events, the web of Ricœur's life was formed, and the development of his own thought certainly has a relation with it, even though not a univocal one. It is to show this relation and, more than anything else, the meaningful shifts in his work as I see them, that the biographical details are included.

It goes without saying that the three stages of the course of conflict are not the beginning or end of Ricœur's philosophy, or of a philosophical interpretation of conflict. Many other philosophers included meaningful accounts of conflict in their own works, and for some of them conflict was at least as important, if not even more, than it was for Ricœur. In parts one and two of this dissertation I will present in its main traits some accounts of conflict that we can find elsewhere. Part one deals with the presence of conflict in the history of philosophy. I start with the Greek cultural landscape and end up assessing Kantian and Post-Kantian philosophy, namely Hegel and Marx. Most of the models analyzed in this part

exerted some influence in Ricoeurian philosophy, especially the philosophies of Kant and Hegel. Ricœur famously depicted himself as a “Post-Hegelian Kantian”. Thus part one of this dissertation, after revisiting the Greek source, will provide an account of Kant’s antinomies in the *Critique of Pure Reason* (complemented by an analysis of the role of negation, whose role is constitutive for conflict), a description of Hegelian dialectic and of the Marxist and Post-Marxist radicalization of conflict, leading up to a whole new field, that of the sociology of conflict, or “conflict theory.” This intersection between the theoretical domains of philosophy and sociology will prove to be decisive in part two of this dissertation.

It goes without saying that my take on conflict is first and foremost philosophical. This delimitation of my field of study is what allows for a rule-governed polysemy to be found. Thus I will not study the phenomenon of conflict as it is sometimes seen in political theory, namely, in the relation between States and the occurrence of war. However, the depiction of intersubjective conflicts at a societal level will sometimes bring me to the neighborhood of sociology and this will be fundamental in the last parts of my dissertation, where I will put forward some claims concerning a discipline that is many times forgotten or neglected, that is, social philosophy. This choice obviously has its consequences.

Part two is dedicated to an analysis of the contemporary reappraisal of the notion of conflict through some of the key authors that contributed to this revitalization. Many authors could have been included in this lot, authors who reappraise and analyze conflict in a variety of ways, from Lyotard to Rancière, not forgetting the many forms of Post-Marxism. The analysis of each one of these authors and their possible relation to Ricœur’s own standpoint would be, in itself, a book-length discussion. Because I could not do justice to their own standpoints here, and in order to avoid this study becoming too lengthy and the mixture of thematics almost unintelligible, I chose to concentrate on those authors who, reassessing and reappraising conflict in their own ways, have the most meaningful connections with Ricœur. These are, for the most part, authors in the Critical Theory tradition like Habermas and Honneth, as well as Anglo-Saxon political philosophers, either from the liberal tradition (Rawls) or the communitarian standpoint (Walzer and Taylor). The pragmatic sociology of Boltanski and Thévenot is included in the lot because their analysis of conflict was vital for Ricœur, and Hunyadi’s depiction of the “virtue of conflict” is included because it

is a powerful model for assessing conflict, alongside those of Habermas and Honneth. This is the reason why I dedicate chapters to each one of these authors, and only mention many others in passing, sometimes dedicating sections of chapters to them, other times only bringing up occasional contributions meaningful for the debate I am engaging with at the moment. In a nutshell, the authors and topics dealt with in the first two parts were chosen either because they represent the most fundamental and important models of conflict, or, primarily, because they exerted an influence in Ricœur's philosophy. Thus the discussions of the first parts (which are not following a diachronic approach in part two, and only partially so in part one) somehow serve as prelude to what we will see in the course of conflict as such, that is, the three following parts.

The third part of the thesis will deal with the first stage in the course of conflict. From this point onwards, I will adopt a method of analysis that is both thematic and loosely chronological. In part three, the focus will be on Ricœur's first publications from the 1940s and 1950s, as he was caught up in the problems of existence, finitude, and their relation to transcendence, as well as the main problem of the will and its dialectical relation with the involuntary, which circumscribes the phenomenon of human action. The last chapter of this third part will allude to Ricœur's first incursion into the domain of historiography, such as we can find it in the first collection of essays published in the 1950s under the title *History and Truth*.⁸ This chapter will at the same time prepare the transition for part four, because I will include a discussion on method and deal with the epistemological consequences of Ricœur's own version of perspectivism. This discussion will largely anticipate his thematic reflections on methodology – including the famous “long route” – that we will include in the hermeneutic phase, which will be the core of part four.

Part four will therefore be dedicated to the relevance that conflict assumes at the hermeneutic level. It will deal with the hermeneutic turn of Ricœur's work, starting with the publication of *The Symbolism of Evil*⁹ in 1960 and extending all

⁸ Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth*, translated by Charles Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965).

⁹ Paul Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, translated by Emerson Buchanan (New York, Harper and Row, 1967).

the way until the late 1980s with the publication of *From Text to Action*.¹⁰ This part of the dissertation will depict the main characterization of conflict that is made in the first phase of this hermeneutic turn, which broadly corresponds to the 1960s and to the publication of *The Conflict of Interpretations*¹¹, whose emphasis is in the conflict of symbols and the clash between psychoanalysis, structuralism and the phenomenology of religion. In this part, I will also look at the second phase of the hermeneutic turn, that is, the period of the 1970s and 1980s, in which the emphasis shifts from symbols to texts and the conflict takes place at the level of discourse and text interpretation. This last hermeneutic phase encompasses the conflicts taking place with metaphors, narratives and among broad methodological choices which define hermeneutics itself, such as the clash between “explanation” and “understanding”. Finally, this phase also marks the first stage of incorporation of the analytic philosophy of action into the philosophy of Paul Ricœur. We will see how Ricœur uses philosophy of language and phenomenology to try to grasp human action, namely in *La Sémantique de l’Action*¹². This intersection between language and action was further explored in *From Text to Action*, where Ricœur uses the metaphor of the text to explain human action. At this point of his production, his hermeneutics includes a philosophy of action as one of its offshoots. The last chapter will shed some light on its main details, and with the hermeneutics of action the transition to part five will be accomplished.

Part five of this thesis will deal with the last stage of Ricœur’s production and also of the course of conflict. This will be the opportunity to show that in the last analysis this philosophy is, as Johann Michel has forcefully argued, a philosophy of human action.¹³ The passage through the domain of language and hermeneutics will have also inaugurated the indirect mediation between the immediate I and the reflexive self, between existence and self-interpretation. If the

¹⁰ Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1991).

¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *The Conflict of Interpretations. Essays in Hermeneutics*, edited by Don Ihde (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

¹² This work does not exist in English translation, only in the French original and in Italian and Portuguese translations. In chapter 4.5 I will offer a glimpse at the significance of these lectures, whose corrected version I edited in Portuguese. See Paul Ricœur, *La sémantique de l’action*, edited by Dorian Tiffeneau, Coll. Phénoménologie et Herméneutique (Paris: C.N.R.S., 1977). For the Portuguese translation, see Paul Ricœur, *O Discurso da Ação*, edited by Gonçalo Marcelo (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2013).

¹³ See Johann Michel, *Paul Ricœur, une philosophie de l’agir humain* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2006).

conflictual aspect of the self will by that time already been clearly signaled (namely in part three), this conflictuality will be deepened and further explained in part five. In this part, dedicated to practical conflicts, conflict will make its way all the way through fundamental ethics, applied ethics, the theory of justice and social philosophy. There, the fragile constitution of the capable human being, he or she who is constantly “acting and suffering”, will become fully apparent, as the touchstone of Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology. The last chapter of part five will be dedicated to analyzing Ricœur’s course of recognition. With the course of recognition, the course of conflict will also stop, and we will have come full circle.

With these three stages the course of conflict will have been brought to completion.¹⁴ However, there will be three additional parts to this dissertation. These three parts will be substantially different from those that precede them. On the one hand, they will be shorter and very concise. On the other hand, they will be largely autonomous. In the first one of them, part six, I will try to give a systematic account of what has been said about the significance of conflict in Paul Ricœur, and to complement the course of conflict with an analysis of the other interconnected notions that help to limit and define it. This will complete my rational reconstruction of Ricœur’s philosophy. It will be the synchronic counterpart to the mostly diachronical approach undertaken in the three preceding parts. It will show that even though conflict is the key to Ricœur’s philosophy, he himself did not understand his philosophy as a mere emphasis on conflict *qua* conflict. This part will be my provisional conclusion on his philosophy.

Part seven will take a further step in the autonomization process, in that I will address some critical remarks to what has been said before. I will put forward a proposal of critical theory and radical hermeneutics that will largely go beyond Ricœur, and my critiques will aim at seeing exactly how radical is Ricœur’s hermeneutics and how critical is his critical theory. Finally, part eighth will be really autonomous, in that, largely inspired by Ricoeurian philosophy, but also by Critical Theory and the other meaningful influences assessed in parts one and two, I will put forward my proposal of a hermeneutic social philosophy, aimed at

¹⁴ Or maybe I should rather say that my discourse on the course of conflict in Ricœur’s work will have come to an end. Certainly, I do not pretend to be fully exhaustive in my depiction, and it would be rather pretentious to assume I was. Since this is a hermeneutical study, it does not pretend to be more than an interpretation, and this course might have assumed different forms and directions. It will be up to the reader acquainted with Ricœur’s works to propose an alternative reading and course, should one become apparent.

recovering a project of emancipation and rooted in what I think will be a new critique of reason.

As it is now apparent, this dissertation has a diverse and manifold structure. As it is a lengthy undertaking, some readers might prefer to read it otherwise than in a traditional way, from beginning to end. Readers interested in a partial history of conflict in philosophy, from the Greek source up until Marx, and then in some of the discussion which took place in the 20th century, more than in Ricoeurian philosophy itself, might choose to concentrate on parts one and two. Readers only interested in the diachronic approach to Ricœur's philosophy from the vantage point of conflict, can skip the first two parts and read only parts three, four and five. A condensed version of the results of my assessment can be found in parts six and seven. Finally, readers uninterested or only remotely interested in Ricœur, but curious about my own modest attempt to put forward a hermeneutic social philosophy, could go straight to part eight.

Some very concise notes on the structure of the thesis and on my methodology must be added. The dissertation has eight parts, besides a prologue, a conclusion and this introduction. Each part is divided in chapters, and each chapter is subdivided in sections. The number of chapters or sections in each part is uneven, as is their respective number of pages. This imperfection in form is justified by the difference in relative importance of each of the chapters or sections. Some subjects simply could not be dealt with in a more succinct manner. However, there is also a mark of contingency in my own method, and in the origins of the secondary bibliography I use to help me think and put forward my own claims.

Even though the corpus of Ricoeurian studies is nowadays massive, with a fast growing increase in the number of dissertations, papers and books written on Ricœur, I must acknowledge the limitations of my own reading capacities. The body of literature with which I am most acquainted comprises mainly studies written in English, French or Portuguese. Because of that limitation, the dissertation will mainly quote studies published in these languages, with some occasional exceptions.

Whenever possible, I quote from the existing English translations. However, because I always read the French originals and can not always find the English translations, or in cases in which none exists – which is the case of

Ricœur's earlier books or many of the so-called *introuvables*, the lesser known texts, mainly comprising a majority of papers or conference presentations written in French, many of which I quote here and to which I was granted access at the Fonds Ricœur – I opt for providing a translation myself, if the quotation is deemed important enough to appear directly in the body text. Whenever it seems to me that the intelligibility of the claim can do without the quotation, I include it in a footnote, usually in its original language. Since I am not a native English speaker, some of the translations might not be perfect, but I assume full responsibility for them.

I always quote the English titles when translations exist, but when I mention the date of publication of these books or articles, I always refer to the original publication date, in case these are texts originally published in French and not in English. In the bibliography added at the end of this dissertation, I choose to always list Ricœur's publications according to their original versions, but add the references to the translations used in English or other languages. The table of contents will likely prove to be useful when navigating the somewhat complex maze of this dissertation.

Finally, allow me to mention that you will sometimes find a repetition of some topics or quotations in this dissertation. This happens, partly, because the evolution of Ricœur's work is dialectical – somewhat like Hegel's, but with important differences which I will discuss below – and therefore he often comes back to the same old topics, but revisiting them anew. I confess to having fallen prey to that same temptation, and I expect that readers will not feel exasperated if some topics resurface here and there. This amounts to a strategy that was familiar among ancient philosophers, and namely Plato, and which aimed at making the readers so acquainted with a certain topic that they eventually followed the thread of the argument naturally and were more easily persuaded. Whether or not I succeeded, if only partially, in this endeavor, I leave to the reader's better judgment.

Part One

The Significance of Conflict for Ricœur's Theoretical Framework – Main Sources and Theoretical Influences

From what has been said up until now and from what the reader can legitimately anticipate at this point, it might seem as if I am overemphasizing the presence and the role of conflict both in the thought of Paul Ricœur and in Philosophy in general. And insofar as the dynamic of conflict is in itself an antithetic, that is, a development brought about by a process of *negation*, this legitimate but wrong anticipation could lead to a slippery slope whose conclusion would be that I would be equating Ricœur's philosophy with some hyperbolic philosophy of negation whose specific shape could then be compared to Sartre's *Being and Nothingness*¹⁵ or Adorno's *Negative Dialectics*.¹⁶

Actually, this is not the case. Before offering a summary of the main loci of conflict in the history of philosophy, and the way they influenced Ricœur, allow me to also offer a caution about the role of conflict in his philosophy. This will be important to see at what fundamental levels he does not allow conflict to take over. This brief summary will function as a first delimitation of the general framework of Ricœur's philosophy. As such, and after the first five parts of this thesis, this framework will be rendered more precise in part six. At the level of a fundamental ontology, Ricœur postulates the primacy of the moment of "primary affirmation"¹⁷ over negation, even if, as we shall see in the later chapters, Ricœur's thought undergoes a process of long mediation that progressively postpones, transforms and even tones down ontological claims (a process that is at its height in *Oneself as Another*).¹⁸ In fact, in the article "Negativity and Primary Affirmation" (1956) Ricœur, disputing Sartre's identification of being-in-itself with nothingness¹⁹, tries to recover a Philosophy of Being as *act*:

¹⁵ Jean-Paul Sartre, *Being and Nothingness: An Essay on Phenomenological Ontology* (New York: Pocket Books, 1978).

¹⁶ Theodor Adorno, *Negative Dialectics*, translated by E. B. Ashton (London: Routledge, 1973).

¹⁷ Ricœur, "Negativity and Primary Affirmation" in *History and Truth*, pp. 305-328.

¹⁸ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1992).

¹⁹ Ricœur, "Negativity and Primary Affirmation", p. 324.

The function of negation is to render the philosophy of being difficult, as Plato was the first to have recognized in the *Sophist*: “being and non being embarrass us equally”. Under the pressure of the negative, of negative experiences, we must reach a notion of being which is *act* rather than *form*, living affirmation, the power of existing and of making exist.²⁰

As we shall see, this definition of philosophy as *act*, strongly reminiscent of the Aristotelian notion of *energeia*, as well as of Spinoza’s *conatus*, remained at the heart of Ricœur’s philosophy and existential standpoint up until the very end, as can easily be attested by reading *Living up to Death*.²¹ This is his attempt at a philosophy of life, which probably stems from the early influence of Bergson but that, nonetheless, never achieved a definitive, achieved form. It indicates that in a certain way, Ricœur wanted his philosophy to be a philosophy marked by an intention to say *yes* rather than *no*, or, better put, to say *yes* in spite of the overwhelming presence of the *no*. This assumes many forms: to affirm life *in spite of* the negative in our lives, such as suffering, the tragic choice between two bad options; to posit personal convictions *in spite of* the necessity of sharp and lucid demystifying critiques often associated with philosophy; to attest to the existence of one’s personal identity *in spite of* all the limitations of the cogito and the long detour through cultural symbols and the interpretations provided by the human sciences; and, ultimately, to posit Being rather than nothing.

However, every existential consideration notwithstanding the notion of conflict becomes characteristic of his philosophical style. In a first approach, it can be argued that conflict assumes the form of a methodological constraint stemming from an ethical imperative to think philosophical problems from many different viewpoints and, therefore, to try to attain some sort of *enlarged perspective*, as well as to pay homage to every single author whose reflection was important to him. As Ricœur states in his small, autobiographical paper “Auto-compréhension

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 328.

²¹ Ricœur, *Living up to Death*, translated by David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

et histoire” (1987): “I acknowledge, and I am grateful for having been from the start influenced by opposed forces and fidelities”.²²

The fact that this is a hermeneutic philosophy, and that he stresses the importance of the act of reading in the fulfillment and completion of the meaning of any text, enriched his works with an immense body of literature. And it seems as if, at some points, his method assumed a constructivist tendency. In dealing with a certain philosophical problem, for instance, the problem of the *cogito*, consciousness, and when trying to answer the question: do I have access to my inner consciousness, or not?, he wanted to weigh and put to the test evidence for both of the possible answers.

In fact, it was the problem of consciousness that explicitly drew Ricœur’s attention to the existence of a “conflict of interpretations”. When writing his famous and polemical book on Freud,²³ as he tried to provide a sufficient definition of interpretation, Ricœur arrived at the following conclusion: “The difficulty – it initiated my research in the first place – is this: there is no general hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis, but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation. The hermeneutic field is internally at variance with itself.”²⁴ And he went on to conclude that there is a “polarized opposition” that creates “the greatest tension”: that between two apparently irreconcilable hermeneutic styles, the former taking hermeneutics to be the “manifestation and restoration of a meaning addressed to me”, and the latter assuming the hermeneutic task of demystification, reduction of illusion. Ricœur would later drop this opposition, or at least reformulate it in different ways: one such way is to take the first hermeneutics to be a hermeneutics of convictions, and

²² See Ricœur, “Auto-compréhension et histoire”, available at http://www.fondsriceur.fr/photo/Auto%20compr_%20et%20histoire.pdf, p. 1 (my translation). On this notion of “opposed fidelities” and on the need of recognizing a debt towards others and their perspectives, see also Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction. Conversations with François Azouvi and Marc de Launay*, translated by Kathleen Blamey (New York: Columbia University Press, 1998), p. 28: “my problem was to determine whether what I was doing within the philosophical field was not a form of eclecticism, were I really to articulate my multiple allegiances originally and honestly: Gabriel Marcel, Husserl, Nabert, not to mention Freud and the structuralists. This problem of intellectual honesty has always been agonizing for me: not to forget my debt to a given line of inspiration, or to any other.”

²³ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy. An Essay on Interpretation*, translated by Denis Savage (New Haven: Yale University Press, 1970).

²⁴ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, pp. 26-27.

the second one to be some sort of *critical hermeneutics*.²⁵ But in 1965 he had reached this groundbreaking conclusion: there are at least two ways to understand consciousness, one archeological, demystifying, borrowed from Freud, and another that is teleological, Hegelian, that recollects the meaning of each “figure” of consciousness in the figure that supersedes it. These two alternative models are also types of the two broader, conflicting hermeneutic styles that we have just mentioned, hermeneutics as restoration of meaning, and what Ricœur decides to name “hermeneutics of suspicion”.

By “hermeneutics of suspicion” Paul Ricœur understands a general tendency, to be found in the works of thinkers such as Marx, Nietzsche and Freud (even though, we could say, Foucault, Derrida and Critical Theorists could also be added to the lot), who are significantly dubbed the “masters of suspicion”, to distinguish between two types of meaning: one that is blatantly patent, and another which is latent, hidden. Thus these thinkers go on to try to unmask this first meaning in order to uncover what is “really” going on; in the case of consciousness, the common denominator that Ricœur finds among the three of them is the denunciation of consciousness as being “false”, “illusory”. Thus in the different spheres of economy, morality and our psychic life these three “masters of suspicion” proceed to dethrone the almighty Cartesian subject and its pretention to have immediate, transparent access to him or herself, to identify the *ego cogito* with immediate apprehension of the contents of consciousness, to understand its wills and desires, and even to determine him or herself rationally. This confrontation between two radically divergent positions concerning the constitution of human consciousness and, more broadly, the significance of the act of interpretation, does not result in a stalemate, as we will see in more detail in part four.

What I want to focus in on now is Ricœur’s appropriation of this type of conflict and the way in which it will slowly become pervasive in his philosophy. In fact, this conflict has important epistemological implications. If “the hermeneutic field is internally at variance with itself” and if, following Gadamer’s

²⁵ This is explicitly assumed by Ricœur, and this project is the core of his intervention in the important debate between Gadamer and Habermas. See Ricœur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology” in *From Text to Action*, pp. 270-307. For a development of this project with the help of Habermas and Ricœur, see John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics. A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricœur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

assertion with which Ricœur seems to agree, at least up to a certain extent, that the “being that can be understood is language”²⁶, then the result could very well be Nietzsche’s aphorism, stating that “facts is precisely what there is not, only interpretations”.²⁷ And thus we would be stuck in some sort of linguistic relativism in which, at most, we would have different “language games” and “family resemblances” among them.²⁸ The fact that there is a metatheoretical conflict in hermeneutics, a dispute about the very rules that guide interpretation, and that at least one of the parties, in this 1965 conflict, disputes the reality of consciousness and even the existence of truth²⁹ certainly confronts all epistemology in a possible fatal way. The result of this conflict will determine the noesis and the noema, both how we can “know” or “interpret” and the specific contents that are presented to us in that act of knowledge or interpretation.

Ricœur’s solution is to integrate both conflicting parties in his response. Conscience is neither omnipotent, omniscient, nor is it totally inexistent. Knowledge is neither direct, nor is it impossible. Hermeneutics will entail a movement that goes from the first, naïf meaning (sometimes understood as a pre-comprehension) to a *broad*er, more *informed* and more *accurate* meaning, that involves letting both parties in conflict *enlarge* our *perspective*³⁰ and our *access* to the phenomenon in question. Most important of all, this process, which is, in a

²⁶ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method* (London: Continuum, 2004), p. 470.

²⁷ Friedrich Nietzsche, *The Will to Power* translated by Walter Kaufmann and J. Hollingdale (New York: Vintage Books, 1968), §481, p. 267.

²⁸ This seems to be the type of philosophical standpoint best expressed in the second Wittgenstein. See Ludwig Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, 4th edition, translated by G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker and Joachim Schulte (Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell, 2009).

²⁹ This is one of the claims of the so-called “hermeneutics of suspicion” and, actually, one of its boldest assertions. The attack on consciousness depends on the suspicion concerning the existence of truth itself. It can be found in Nietzsche’s early writings. See Friedrich Nietzsche, “On Truth and Lying in a Non-Moral Sense” in *The Birth of Tragedy and Other Writings*, edited by Raymond Geuss and Ronald Speirs (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

³⁰ This is akin to what Kant called, in the *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, the “broad-minded way of thinking” (*erweiterte Denkungsart*). See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, translated by Paul Guyer and Eric Matthews (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2000), §40, pp. 174-175. This is part of his definition of reflective judgment, and it will be given a very specific use by Hannah Arendt and Ricœur in later writings. I will come back to this essential feature of Ricœur’s philosophy (or at least of my own interpretation of it) in parts three and four, when I discuss Ricœur’s perspectivism and the conflict of interpretations. For my own interpretation of this aspect in Kant, I am particularly indebted to Mário Jorge de Carvalho. See *O egoísmo lógico e a sua superação – um aspecto fundamental do projeto crítico de Kant* in *Kant: Posteridade e Atualidade* (Lisboa: C.F.U.L., 2007), pp. 229-256 and also Mário Jorge de Carvalho, “Problemas de Desconfinamento de Perspectiva: pensar por si, o pensamento de outrem e alguns preconceitos sobre a filosofia actual e o passado da filosofia” in AAVV., *Os Longos Caminhos do Ser – Homenagem a Manuel Barbosa da Costa Freitas* (Lisboa: Universidade Católica Editora, 2003), pp. 117-138.

specific sense that we will have to further explain in later parts of this dissertation, *dialectical*, really becomes the methodological touchstone of his philosophy. The conflict of interpretations becomes part of his specific grasping of philosophical problems. In fact, Ricœur's own approach to philosophy usually involves the analysis of local, well-delimited problems:

What I believe, or at any rate what I can tell about myself, is that each book is determined by a fragmentary problem. I very strongly hold to the idea, moreover, that philosophy is addressed to specific problems, to well-circumscribed difficulties of thought. (...) My books have always been limited in scope. I have never posed massive questions of the type: what is philosophy? I deal with particular problems.³¹

The end-result of this process is that in order to solve each one of these particular difficulties he adopts what he calls "the long route" [*voie longue*], one full of detours, the detour of the confrontation with the several possible angles of response to the specific problem he is addressing, one in which the conflict of interpretations plays itself out until the philosophical object at stake has been properly grasped and defined.

One could call this process "dialectical", in that, at its best, this conflictual procedure is creative, that is, it is not only the dissolution of a false opposition, a choice between a "good" description of the phenomenon and a "bad" one, but rather an immanent development stemming from the clash of the two conflicting positions. Not a simple mixture, not a raw eclecticism, but a third, comprehensive position that does not exhaust the description of the phenomenon but makes it move *forward*. Now, this all sounds very Hegelian, but it is not, as such, *fully* Hegelian.

Among the many influences that we can count as having been fundamental for this philosophy, I think that the ongoing debate between Kant and Hegel probably is the most decisive. If the whole of German idealism took place, chronologically, between Kant and Hegel, and if the theoretical discussion that this *gigantomachia* sparked entailed the destiny of reason, philosophy, human freedom and, ultimately, the whole of human history, then we can say that this debate never reached its endpoint. And we can also say that Ricœur, as many

³¹ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 81.

others in his time – let us just mention Eric Weil – felt divided in this debate and, simultaneously, understood the drama this discussion occasioned.

Paul Ricœur's own definition of his philosophical standpoint in the 60s was, following Weil, a bit perplexing; echoing this *gigantomachia*, he defined himself as practicing some sort of “post-Hegelian Kantianism”:

The Kantianism that I wish to develop now is, paradoxically, more to be constructed than repeated; it would be something like a post-Hegelian Kantianism, to borrow an expression from Eric Weil, which, it appears, he applied to himself. For my own part I accept the paradox, for reasons that are both philosophical and theological.

First, for reasons that are philosophical: chronologically, Hegel comes after Kant, but we later readers go from one to the other. In us, something of Hegel has vanquished something of Kant; but something of Kant has vanquished something of Hegel, because we are as radically post-Hegelian as we are post-Kantian. In my opinion, it is this exchange and this permutation which still structure philosophical discourse today. This is why the task is to think them always better by thinking them together – one against the other, and one by means of the other. Even if we begin by thinking something else, this “thinking Kant and Hegel better” pertains, in one way or the other, to this “thinking differently from Kant or Hegel”, “something other than Kant or Hegel”.³²

this “thinking Kant and Hegel better”, as pompous as it might sound at the beginning, is nothing other than a methodological and epistemological declaration. Ricœur is trying, or so I am arguing, to put forward a Hegelian dialectical method, even though one that has original contents, is strictly hermeneutic, and is rigorously delimited by the Kantian framework of a “philosophy of limits”.

And why does Ricœur's philosophy assume such a shape? Because by saying that it is a “hermeneutic” philosophy, we are also affirming that it is a *philosophy of finitude*, i.e., one that takes human finitude and, moreover, the finitude of every act of interpretation as its starting point. According to Ricœur's words at the end of his Lectures on Hermeneutics, one must choose between Absolute Knowing and Hermeneutics³³. It is the gap left by the impossibility of

³² Ricœur, “Freedom in the light of hope” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 412.

³³ Ricœur explicitly states “entre le savoir absolu et l'herméneutique, il faut choisir”. See Paul Ricœur, *Cours sur l'herméneutique*, Cours polycopié (Louvain: Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université Catholique de Louvain, 1971), p. 228.

the Hegelian Absolute Knowing that must be filled by the competition between finite interpretations, in a process of perpetual reinterpretation.

This means that in this type of philosophy, and even if Ricœur is a Christian believer, there is no equation between faith and reason, theology and philosophy, no self-presentation of the Absolute. He makes this clear in an article about his friend Pierre Thévenaz. In this piece, when depicting Thévenaz's standpoint, Ricœur is really presenting his own standpoint at the same time: that of a philosopher "without Absolute".³⁴ So Hegelian he is, but not *completely* Hegelian. His position can more accurately be described, in Johann Michel's words, as a kind of "broken Hegelianism" [*hégélianisme brisé*]³⁵, that is, a philosophy of incomplete mediations between fragmentary conflicts that never closes itself off in the form of a complete system. It is, if we dare say, a plurality without a totality or, perhaps, one whose totality is only ideal and that contains a multiplicity of possible unities, each of which is just the perspective on the whole grasped from a particular, situated viewpoint.

We can therefore understand how the dynamic of conflict is the driving force of this philosophy; it is that which makes it move forward. Nonetheless, we are still far from having grasped the many particular forms or figures in which it instantiates itself, or the different ways in which Ricœur deals with it. If we are to grasp it we must follow the "long route", the incomplete mediations of its instantiation.

This is, in short, a very condensed summary of how conflict works in Ricœur's philosophy, its methodological significance and ontological limit. As it is easy to conclude from these introductory remarks, the main figures of conflict in the history of philosophy that exerted an influence in Ricœur are to be found in

³⁴ Allow me to include a longer quotation which makes fully explicit what is a philosophy "without Absolute". "La foi, la foi dans la Croix du Christ, telle qu'il la comprend et la vit dans un contexte ecclésial et dogmatique protestant, ne le condamne pas à la non-philosophie : elle le rend au contraire à l'autonomie de la réflexion. Mais cette liberté de philosopher à quoi il est remis par sa foi, il ne la dépense pas non plus à accorder, à harmoniser les énoncés de sa philosophie à ceux de sa foi : la philosophie, selon lui, n'a pas la charge de parler *sur* Dieu, encore moins du point de vue de Dieu; on verra même qu'elle atteint son authenticité quand elle avoue son impuissance, mieux, son renoncement à devenir philosophie du divin, philosophie divine. A une philosophie *divine* il opposera constamment une philosophie responsable *devant Dieu*, une philosophie où Dieu n'est plus l'objet suprême de la philosophie, mais où il est impliqué à titre de pôle d'appel et de réponse de l'acte philosophique lui-même." Ricœur, "Un philosophe protestant: Pierre Thévenaz" in *Lectures 3. Aux frontières de la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), p. 246.

³⁵ See the section "Hégélianisme inversé et hégélianisme brisé" in Johann Michel, *Ricœur et ses contemporains* (Paris: P.U.F., 2013), pp. 47-56.

Kant and Post-Kantian philosophy (above all, in Hegel). Or, better put, the Kantian antinomies provide Ricœur with the framework within which his Hegelian inclinations are forced to restrict themselves. Within this framework, he has to recur to hermeneutics and the conflict of interpretations in order to be creative, without transgressing the bounds strictly imposed by his Kantianism.

I could have started the pages that follow by going straight into Kant and Post-Kantian philosophy, given its admitted influence in Ricoeurian philosophy. However, in philosophy, one must start from the beginning. And in the beginning (at least for philosophy) there were the Greeks, and already in Greece conflict was taken to be a major source for speculation. Conflict had to be accounted for. And we find in the Greeks many forms of conflict which, in turn, influenced other thinkers (let me mention Nietzsche and Hannah Arendt as two obvious examples) who, in turn, also left a strong impression on Ricœur.

As such, my historical account of the models of conflict will take the Greek cultural source as its point of departure and then, ignoring the major gap and centuries of history of philosophy overlooked, fast forward into modernity, making a short stop in Hobbes and Rousseau, in order to afterwards go straight into Kant and Post-Kantian philosophy. This brief presentation will find in Greece the sources of cosmic, metaphysic conflict (for instance, in Heraclitus), interpersonal conflict (as in Hobbes' depiction of the state of nature) or the conjunction of both in Greek tragedy. Kant will provide us with the theoretical model of conflict as reciprocal limitation, whereas in Hegel conflict will be the metaphysical motor of history. In Marx, where our historical depiction stops, conflict will be instrumental in bringing about revolution.

Ricœur was acquainted with all these sources, and I will often mention his comments on all these models of conflict. I will walk with Ricœur, but not necessarily following his footsteps. Throughout these two following parts of the dissertation, besides assessing the theoretical consequences of the authors and phenomena I am alluding too, I will also be gathering the elements to be later used in my proposal of social philosophy.

1.1 – The Pre-History of Conflict in Philosophy: From Ancient *Agon* to Modern Struggle

1.1.1 – The Greek embattled cosmogony and mythology

This dissertation will discuss at length many aspects of conflict in contemporary philosophy. However, a certain historical background is necessary in order to grasp the way in which the acknowledgment of a tensional aspect of existence seems to be present even in our oldest cultural sources. We who inhabit the West – or, better put, the North Atlantic – are the spiritual offspring of two main sources, namely the Greek and Hebraic cultures. I will focus very briefly in the Greek source, not only because it witnessed the birthplace of philosophy, but also because the conflictual and agonistic character seems to be more present in it than in its Hebraic counterpart.

For most of our philosophical and cultural tradition, Greece was by and large considered as the embodiment of rationality; there is no reason to be amazed by this assessment since it was in that very particular juncture that spectacular developments in mathematics and astronomy took place, as well as the first systematic and serious attempts to develop disciplines such as history, geography and zoology. Nonetheless, paradoxically as it may at first glance seem, the same culture that invented *logos* also contained within itself strong elements of a fundamental and powerful *irrationality*.

Nietzsche, in the early article “The Dionysiac worldview”, which is reprinted in English alongside *The Birth of Tragedy*³⁶, his seminal first book that develops and expands the early article, insightfully spoke about what he took to be the two major influences rocking Greek culture, namely, the “Apolline” and the “Dionysiac”. In Nietzsche’s description, these were not only the names of the cults respectively dedicated to the Gods Apollo and Dionysus. Rather, they are taken to be the inspiring principles guiding Greek art, thought and action. And they are also seen as being, in some way, complementary even though opposed – or, in other words, dialectical. The Apolline creator embodies individuality, order and rationality whereas his Dionysiac counterpart is inspired by intoxication and

³⁶ Friedrich Nietzsche, “The Dionysiac Worldview” in *The Birth of Tragedy*, pp. 117-138.

ecstasy. In Dionysiac art subjectivity allegedly disappears, as it is swallowed by “the erupting force of the general element in human nature”.³⁷

This is a very powerful and compelling depiction, whatever its historical truth. The accuracy of the historical details presented is somewhat disputed³⁸, but Nietzsche certainly captured an essential conflict in Greek culture; he himself explicitly asserts that Apollo and Dionysus “represent stylistic opposites which exist side by side and in almost perpetual conflict with one another”.³⁹ Whether or not it is true that only in dream and intoxication, as Nietzsche contends, do we find delight in existence, he also significantly contributed to the contemporary reappraisal of tragic conflict, and tragic wisdom. I argue that he did so, because what he called the “Dionysiac elements” of Greek culture were a sign of a deep-seated violence, madness and irrationality that occasionally burst out into the open.

This can, in fact, be understood against the backdrop of the Greek struggle between reason and unreason. The best depiction of this irrationality paradoxically mixed with the effort to impose rationality is given by E. R. Dodds in his *The Greeks and the Irrational*.⁴⁰ Dodds’s seminal book is an attempt to uncover the elements of mystery and the less conscious levels of human experience that we can find in Greek culture.⁴¹ His was the first systematic attempt to critically assess the image of Greek life as a monolithic expression of rationality. He shows how the actions of Homeric heroes are overdetermined, in that there is a two level explanation for their behaviour: on the one hand, their subjective freedom, but on the other hand, the will of a god, or *moira*.⁴²

³⁷ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 120.

³⁸ Nietzsche’s particular style is very peculiar and idiosyncratic. His depictions are not always accurate but this should not blind us to their philosophical pertinence. Whatever the historical accuracy of what he says, we should bear in mind that his interpretation of the Greeks, of Christianity, Buddhism, and so on, convey his *own* philosophy. If he at times misreads or reads them too quickly and in a problematic manner should not surprise us, because this approach is meant to produce effects, it is a performative. I will say a little more about his style below. As for the reception of the *Birth of Tragedy*, it was promptly criticized by the German scholars of the 19th century, following a harsh review by Ulrich von Wilamowitz-Möllendorf and not taken as serious scholarship for more than 40 years. A more detailed account of this can be found in the introduction to the *Birth of Tragedy* by Raymond Geuss (p. xxviii). This harsh criticism and Nietzsche’s subsequent biographic events (including his failed Professorship) might account for the later deepening of his pessimism.

³⁹ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 119.

⁴⁰ E. R. Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational* (Berkeley: California University Press, 1951).

⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁴² See p. 7 of the first chapter, “Agamemnon’s apology”.

Furthermore, they are sometimes carried away by some sort of perversion of their *thumos* (which can roughly be translated as the organ of feeling) to the point of blindness, when they cease to act rationally. Other forms of madness (*mania*) will be later emphasized by Plato who, in the *Phaedrus*, attests that “in reality the greatest of blessings come to us through madness, when it is sent as a gift of the gods.”⁴³

Allow me now to take a step back and to try to trace back this conflictual aspect of Greek culture to the very early expressions of their religion and mythology. These aspects are well known and I will be doing nothing more than recalling the most salient of them. Perhaps the conflict between rationality and irrationality, which we already alluded to, can find its earliest locus in Greek poetry in the role *chaos* and *cosmos* play in the Greek cosmogony. According to the poet of the *Theogony*⁴⁴, “Chaos was first of all” (v. 116), and only after do we begin to discern the individuation of particular forms. From Chaos came the night, and from night the day was born.

The examples of violence in this cosmogony are so plentiful, that it seems almost redundant to bring them up. Each generation that comes into being has to struggle for its existence, over against the preceding one, and this is not without its symbolic force. The episode of Kronos mutilating the genitals of his father Ouranos and tossing them into the sea (vv. 189 and ff.) is particularly striking, but it is hardly an exception. The Giants, the Titans and finally the Olympians display a wide array of power struggles that we do not need to recall in detail in order to make our point. Even the venerated Olympians needed to fight their Titanomachy before the poet of the *Theogony* could deem them fit to rule over people.

Likewise, there is no denying that courage is the main virtue that we can find in the *Iliad*⁴⁵, whose characters are sometimes taken by a divine madness, a sort of frenzy (*menos*), many times embodied in Hector, Ajax or Achilles. We can therefore speak of a certain identification of the Greek *arete* with the virtues of the warrior (and no wonder that this period is significantly called the *heroic age*), at least before the classical period. In a way, at least one notable *polis*, Sparta during the golden period from the VI to the IV centuries B.C. significantly identified its

⁴³ Plato, *Phaedrus*, translated by Harold North Fowler, (Cambridge, Mass: Harvard University Press, 1914) (Loeb Edition) 244a, p. 465.

⁴⁴ Hesiod, *Theogonis* (London: Penguin, 1973).

⁴⁵ Homer, *The Iliad*, translated by Robert Fagles (London: Penguin, 1991).

civic *arete* with this warrior ideal. Werner Jaeger, for instance, has rightly emphasized how the civic and military elegies of the Spartan poet Tyrtaeus provided a strong cultural model that was respected throughout Greece.⁴⁶ Nietzsche often lauded these warrior virtues, or aristocratic virtues as he sometimes called it, and opposed them to what he dubbed “slave morality”, “morality of the weak”, “inversion of values” or simply “ressentiment”.⁴⁷

Now, the theological-cosmogonic background of omnipresent violence certainly played a part in the apology of heroism and, later, in a certain rationalization of competition in the form of argument in the public space, which we will see in section 1.1.5 below. However, the conflictual backdrop also assumed other forms in Greek thought. I want to emphasize one of them that is specifically metaphysical.

1.1.2 – Heraclitus and metaphysical conflict

Of all the Pre-Socratic philosophers, Heraclitus is perhaps the one whose philosophy – alongside the one of his monadic counterpart Parmenides – has had a more profound influence in all subsequent history. Like all the other Pre-Socratics, Heraclitus’s writings – namely, his influential book – are all completely lost, except for a few fragments that survived in later literature; he was considered one of the best writers in Ancient Greece but in spite – or perhaps because – of this fact, his words display a fundamental ambiguity that makes any interpretation of them extremely risky and unsure. Charles Kahn insightfully noted that this is in part due to the fact that he was both a philosopher and a poet, and usually chose to express himself in a prophetic tone.⁴⁸ Not surprisingly, he was known as “the Obscure”. Thus we can say about Heraclitus what he himself declared about Apollo: “The lord whose oracle is in Delphi neither declares nor conceals, but gives a sign” (fragment XXXIII Kahn)⁴⁹, if we interpret “giving a sign” as

⁴⁶ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia: The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume 1: Archaic Greece, The Mind of Athens*, translated by Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1946), p. 87.

⁴⁷ These topics resurface in many of Nietzsche’s writings. However, we can find the essential claims in Nietzsche, *On the Genealogy of Morality*, translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸ Charles Kahn, *The Art and Thought of Heraclitus. An edition of the fragments with translation and commentary* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), p. 7.

⁴⁹ There are several different ways to organize and *a fortiori* to translate these difficult fragments, according to what philologists believe was the structure of Heraclitus’s book and also to which of

“speaking symbolically”. The importance of the symbolic element of human language will be time and again emphasized by Ricœur, as we will see in the *Symbolism of Evil* and elsewhere.

Heraclitus is mainly known for his theory of the universal flux, which is somewhat scolded by Plato; this is mainly expressed metaphorically in the famous fragment L: “As they step into the same rivers, other and still other waters flow upon them.” The same metaphor eventually led many commentators to assume that they had to “dive” in the thought of Heraclitus so that they could grasp it in all its “depth”.⁵⁰ He is also known for his assertions concerning the underlying harmony and even unity of opposing elements, as we can easily attest in fragments CIII: “The way up and down is one and the same” and CXXIV: “Graspings: wholes and not wholes, convergent divergent, consonant dissonant, from all things one and from one thing all.” For the Post-Hegelian philosopher, this resonates well with the dialectical mode of thinking to which we will come back many times over the course of this dissertation. In fact, Hegel wholeheartedly stated “There is no proposition of Heraclitus which I have not adopted in my own Logic.”⁵¹

As far as we can understand in a more or less straightforward manner what Heraclitus is proposing, we can say, in a nutshell, that his is a metaphysical depiction of the order of things – both human and cosmic – based on an underlying equilibrium of conflicts. This is very plain in his apology of the heroic virtues that we have alluded to above; fragment C states: “Gods and men honor those who fall in battle”. But the most striking aphorisms are evidently those that are expressed metaphorically, because those are the ones whose indeterminacy makes them applicable both at a micro and a macro level, both in human and cosmic affairs. I think we can assert that throughout his whole depiction of conflict, a fundamental paradox is expressed; that much we can find in fragment LXIVV: “The path of the carding wheels is straight and crooked.” Perhaps what he is stating is, again, that an underlying straightness supports what he takes to be

these fragments are considered credible. I have chosen to follow Charles Kahn’s organization, and translations. See Kahn, *op. cit.* When fragments are in square brackets, it means that it is not clear whether or not these are really the words of Heraclitus, or whether commentators quoted them from apocryphal sources.

⁵⁰ See the description in Anthony Kenny, *A New History of Western Philosophy, volume I: Ancient Philosophy* (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 2004), p. 13.

⁵¹ Hegel, *Lectures in the History of Philosophy* (London: Routledge, 1968), p. 279 (quoted by Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 13).

crooked; that an order, or a cosmos, can be discerned among chaos. That indeed the Logos is that all things are one or, as Copleston puts it, that the main kernel of his philosophy “consists in the conception of unity in diversity, difference in unity.”⁵²

Once again, the claim is expressed metaphorically, this time not with water, but with fire: “The ordering, the same for all, no god nor man has made, but it ever was and is and will be: fire ever living, kindled in measures and in measures going out.” (fragment XXXVII) It is perhaps not a coincidence that in this case, the metaphor is fire, with all the potential of destruction that this image brings. However, the insistence on the measure, perhaps an effect of the ordering imposed by logos, also seems to bring a relative stability, at least in certain phases. A whole cycle theory of destruction, birth, death and rebirth through tragedy could be drawn here; however, the overdetermination of Heraclitus’s words is such, and the language games and interpretations that they allow for are so varied⁵³, that there is no sure way of knowing whether or not this metaphoric is really ontological or even, as many have put it, pantheistic⁵⁴; but let us assume, even if only for the sake of the argument, that this metaphoric does intend to have an ontological grasp. What has been said up to now is sufficient to see the dynamic that moves his philosophy, and the ground has been laid to quote and analyze in a row several different fragments specifically dealing with conflict:

LXXV

[[The counter-thrust brings together, and from tones at variance comes perfect attunement, and all things come to pass through conflict.]] (Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* VIII 1155b4)

⁵² Frederick Copleston, *A History of Philosophy, Volume 1: Greece and Rome* (New York: Image Books, 1993), pp. 39-40.

⁵³ Kahn speaks about the “linguistic density” of these fragments, namely, that they display a multiplicity of ideas in a single word or phrase. But he adds that if we take into account the phenomenon of resonance, enriching the meaning of each fragment by taking them together into consideration, we have better chances of interpreting them correctly. (Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 89). This is more evident in the fragments that can be grouped together in virtue of their sharing a common topic. This is what I am doing here when analyzing together the group of fragments thematically alluding to conflict. Kahn himself notes (*Ibid.*, p. 90) that a “non-formal resonance” exists between words such as War (*polemos*) and Conflict (*eris*) which appear many times in these fragments.

⁵⁴ See for instance Copleston, *op. cit.* p. 43.

LXXVIII

They do not comprehend how a thing agrees at variance with itself; it is an attunement turning back on itself, like that of the bow and the lyre.

LXXXI

[[Homer was wrong when he said 'Would that Conflict might vanish from among gods and men!' (*Iliad* XVIII, v.107). For there would be no attunement without high and low notes nor any animals without male and female, both of which are opposites.]]

LXXXII

One must realize that war is shared and Conflict is Justice, and that all things come to pass (and are ordained?) in accordance with conflict.

LXXXIII

War is father of all and king of all; and some he has shown as gods, others men; some he has made slaves, others free.

These five main fragments display a deep resonance. Three of them mention conflict (*eris*), another uses the term war (*polemos*) and fragment LXXVIII manifests the fundamental paradox of an agreement “at variance with itself”. Fragments LXXV and LXXXI are suspected of being paraphrases or reminiscences, rather than direct quotations, while the other three seem to be, to the best of our knowledge, the words of Heraclitus himself. However, for the sake of some coherence, I will consider all the fragments as statements of his philosophy, whether direct or indirect. This might be an unfounded assumption, but whether or not these are his own words, they entered in the history of philosophy as being so; and because they are part of this *Wirkungsgeschichte*, I will take them as providing a certain model of conflict, even though we must be cautious in what comes down to authorship.

Fragment LXXV, which is reproduced by Aristotle in his *Nichomachean Ethics* provides us with the most general description of the generative power of conflict in the philosophy of Heraclitus: “all things come to pass through conflict”. Almost that much is asserted in Fragment LXXXII and Kahn considers that LXXV is a paraphrase and a partial quotation of LXXXII, which would amount to Heraclitus’s own words. In both of these fragments, there is an assertion of the

inner interdependence between conflict and what fragments LXXV, LXXVIII and LXXXI call “attunement”. Fragment LXXXII takes a step further and instantiates this attunement, calling it justice.

Now, when he speaks about “attunement” what is at stake is evidently a musical metaphor, as is clear from fragment LXXXI. But its reach seems once again to be ontological: attunement is understood as what produces harmony, not only in music but also, or at least it seems, both in the cosmos and in human affairs. Things “are ordained” (fragment LXXXII) through conflict, and it seems to be that the attunement leading to harmony and justice is an attunement produced by conflict. Or, as fragment LXXVIII puts it: “it is an attunement turning back on itself”.

Kahn provides some important comments concerning the possible meaning of these fragments. He explains that at the time of Heraclitus, what he has translated as “attunement” (and that can be more literally translated as “harmony”, *harmonie*) had basically three possible meanings: physical fitting together of parts; military or social agreement; and musical attunement⁵⁵ and he claims that all these three meanings come together in these fragments in order to form the Heraclitean notion of the “fitting together as the cosmic order as a unity produced from conflict”.⁵⁶ Fragment LXXVIII makes explicit Heraclitus’s scorn of those who can not grasp this intrinsic constitution of things, and fragment LXXXI pushes further this claim, by putting Homer himself in this lot.

I think we can assume, from the reading of this latter fragment, that the novelty of Heraclitean philosophy in the context of the already intrinsically conflictual Greek cultural landscape is that for him it is not sufficient to affirm the existence of scattered conflicts in individual figures, whether we are talking about Gods in a poetic fashion, or trying to empirically describe war among humans. And even though he remains at a fundamentally ambiguous level, his philosophy is already a step ahead in the generalization and universalization of claims; no longer do we find the personification of “conflict” in figures such as Chaos like it was the case in Hesiod. Now, conflict is internal and omnipresent, whatever that might mean. His second claim implicit in the scorning of Homer is the assertion that we can never do away with conflict because it is precisely the inner workings

⁵⁵ Kahn, *op. cit.*, p. 196.

⁵⁶ *Ibid*, p. 197.

of this generalized and internalized conflict that assure that harmony and order are established. Concerning harmony, Kahn insightfully defines it as “an intelligent structure or purposeful activity, a unified whole whose essential parts (or stages or tendencies) are related to one another by polar contrast.”⁵⁷

Finally, fragments LXXXII and LXXXIII introduce war as a meaningful concept. The fact that in fragment LXXXII war is identified with justice is in itself an innovation; we find no such thing in Homer, Hesiod or in the early Pre-Socratics. Kahn interprets this as a transposition of the human into the cosmic order: “The point of this paradoxical equivalence can be understood only if we bear in mind that warfare has become a figure for opposition in general: only at the cosmic level can Conflict and Justice be reconciled and seen as one.”⁵⁸ This is a plausible interpretation because the most important “order” or “harmony” for Heraclitus is the “hidden” one; as such, in the context of his monism, warfare might be seen as an “apparent” evil which, ultimately, is all part of the greater order of things. In this order of things, not only do these conflicts exist, but they are also necessary. Without them, balance would be lost.

In fragment LXXXIII war is hypostasized as a principle superior even to Gods; it is war that decides who is a slave and who is not. This can be understood literally, because in ancient warfare those defeated could in fact be enslaved. But it can in fact also have a metaphorical sense, and Hegel’s master-slave dialectic will later provide us with a significant use of this notion in a different form. And ultimately, as Kahn suggests, here it probably assumes the specifically Heraclitean meaning of a universal principle of opposition. If war governs everything, even Gods are subject to it. If, in the ancient Theogony, even the Olympians had to conquer their place by waging war against the Titans, the result is that it is war itself which decides everything. And if we recall the Heraclitean belief in the perpetual flux, it is perhaps likely that the situation will change and the perpetual state of conflict will bring about a new configuration of the great order of things. As Kahn suggests, this is the recognition of “a positive role for what is *prima facie* a negative term”.⁵⁹

⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

Now, this last suggestion by Kahn is very important. Heraclitus might indeed have been the first to positively assess conflict (or war) instead of only acknowledging its existence. Throughout this thesis, many positive assessments of conflict will be alluded to. But none in fact seems to accord conflict so general and widespread a role, except, in a significantly different way, Hegel's.

Summing up what has been said in these last few pages, we can say that Heraclitus presents a generalized theory of conflict as universal opposition where both human and cosmic oppositions are conflated. He does this by positing an interdependence between conflict and universal equilibrium in ontological terms. This results in a monism where dispersed fragments are almost, as it were, integrated into a systematic whole. There is no such thing as a category of totality in Heraclitus as there will be in German idealism, but we modern readers are almost compelled to read him in these terms. And there is no doubt that he provides us with an overarching, metaphysical model for conflict. This model will be picked up by later philosophers in different ways. His influence is almost surprising, given the scarcity of his writings. Kenny reminds us that the whole of Heraclitus's surviving fragments amounts to no more than 15000 words and that, as a consequence, his enormous influence over later philosophers must be a matter for astonishment.⁶⁰

I do not want to suggest that the philosophy of Heraclitus can serve as a basis for contemporary conflict theory. However, it is important to acknowledge the existence of this vague, overdetermined model where conflict is the overarching principle. Many of the later models will be much more self-contained and restricted. But it is important to keep Heraclitus in mind because he will be, alongside Hegel and Marx, one of the fiercest advocates of this notion in the history of philosophy.

1.1.3 – The tragic vision of the world

Now let us turn to a different cultural phenomenon, namely Greek tragedy. Tragedy is not in itself philosophical in the strict sense. It does not stem

⁶⁰ Kenny, *op. cit.*, p. 16.

from a conceptual effort. But it can be considered, as Ricœur argued, one of the non-philosophical sources of philosophy.

My goal in these next few pages will not be to analyze in detail the tragedies that survived up until our day, nor to delve into its technical details, such as the functions of *mimesis* and *catharsis* that Aristotle emphasized in his *Poetics*⁶¹ and which Ricœur later reshaped in *Time and Narrative*.⁶² Much like everything else that I am writing in this chapter on the Greek cultural world, these pages on tragedy are only meant to recollect certain traits that can be interpreted as symptoms which display an agonistic background. My claim will be, over against Steiner's early work, that the tragic worldview is still a strong source for our contemporary culture, even though it is now radically transformed.

Much has been said about Attic tragedy. Allow me to come back to the young Nietzsche as a paradigmatic figure of this reappraisal. Raymond Geuss, in his introduction to the English translation of *The Birth of Tragedy* reasserts that Nietzsche considered tragedy, beyond any reasonable doubt, "the highest form of culture"⁶³. He also emphasizes that when Nietzsche was writing his first book, he was also explicitly trying to defend a specific cultural model, one that, he hoped, nineteenth century Germany could embrace. His later disappointment and the meaningful shifts in his philosophical standpoint are widely stated and I do not need to recall them here. However, the young Nietzsche still was a fierce advocate of Dionysiac culture forms and probably envisioned a particular form of redemption in them. Thus, Geuss emphasizes that Nietzsche's tragic model can be seen as his remedy to the "ills" of modern society. As such, the young Nietzsche is also Nietzsche, the social philosopher; certainly the musical influence of Wagner played an important role in this solution, as did the Romantic emphasis on the retrieval of meaningful traditions of the past, but I cannot fully explain this here. Geuss goes so far as to state that in providing this solution, Nietzsche is somehow contributing to the history of theodicies: his is a post-Christian theodicy in which what justifies the existence of the world is its aesthetic contemplation. This view will later be combined with a sense of affirmation that will be dubbed the "will to

⁶¹ Aristotle, *Poetics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle*, The Revised Oxford Translation, Volume II, edited by Jonathan Barnes (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984), pp. 2316-2340.

⁶² Ricœur focuses on *mimesis* and not really on *catharsis*. See the chapter "Threefold Mimesis" in Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*, translated by Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1984), pp. 52-87.

⁶³ Geuss, *op. cit.*, p. x.

power”. This later affirmation will also be intrinsically agonistic, but it will be largely independent from the Greek source. Geuss sees the possibility of affirmation even in the *Birth of Tragedy*, stemming from a correct combination between the Apolline and Dionysiac principles.⁶⁴ This is perhaps the best interpretation of what Nietzsche himself dubbed the “pessimism of strength”.

What interests me the most in this first book is precisely Nietzsche’s depiction of the Dionysiac. This element of our nature is described as being “contradiction, bliss born of pain”.⁶⁵ As for the Dionysiac musician, his music is described as stemming from “primal pain”, as being the “primal echo of it”⁶⁶, as if to emphasize its strong but diffuse pathos, in stark contrast with the figurative character of Apolline art.

Nietzsche puts forward the thesis according to which tragedy was born from the chorus⁶⁷ and also that it is precisely in the chorus that we find the essence of tragic drama. This thesis underlines the organic nature of the Dionysiac element; in it “state and society, indeed all divisions between one human being and another, give way to an overwhelming feeling of unity which leads men back to the heart of nature.”⁶⁸

Now, whatever its historical accuracy, this depiction is interesting because it situates the Dionysiac as a state of primal violence (thus of overt conflict, in some sense) while at the same time providing some sort of liberation. In the recurring conflict between the Apolline and the Dionysiac, the Apolline reins in on the Dionysiac impulses through a certain repression, an imposition of order and control. We find some parallels of this description in Freud’s psychoanalytic theory, namely in the relation between the id and the superego. Now, it cannot be stated with enough force how much the early Nietzsche valued the Dionysiac element. To be sure, he did also recognize the need for the Apolline element, in order that a certain balance could be reached.⁶⁹ The Dionysiac *qua*

⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xxvi.

⁶⁵ Nietzsche, *ibid.*, p. 27. He also has an insightful comment when describing the Greeks as having a “unique gift for *suffering*” (pp. 23-24); indeed was not the *pathos* of the tragic art form a recognition of human fragility and an acknowledgement that the condition of the tragic hero was at the same time the condition of every human being?

⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁶⁹ That much is stated by Geuss: “The construction of a higher culture requires both a sympathetic recognition of the existence of the Dionysiac and an integration of it into an alliance with what

Dionysiac, would be untenable if it were a permanent state, because it would amount to total chaos and a denial of subjective individuation. But what he does highlight is the way in which after Doric art, and after Attic tragedy (in fact, already after Sophocles) the Apolline, rational element radically took over, to the point of almost doing away with the Dionysiac altogether.

And of course that the fault for this radical shift had a name; the name of Nietzsche's target, as often, was none other than Socrates. But Nietzsche's attack comes through an indirect source; Socrates is depicted as embodying the principle of rationalism, and as having decisively influenced Euripides. This influence, in turn, symbolized for Nietzsche the death of tragedy. In fact, has he forcefully put it in the following strong words, tragedy as he sees it eventually committed suicide:

Greek tragedy perished differently from all the other, older sister-arts: it died by suicide, as the result of an irresolvable conflict, which is to say tragically, while all the others died the most beautiful and peaceful deaths, fading away at a great age.⁷⁰

Why did it commit suicide? Because, according to Nietzsche, in the tragedies of Euripides, "the thinker", tragedy betrayed its own principles and vision. These are tragedies "in their decadent form".⁷¹ And why was this so? Nietzsche puts forward several reasons: firstly, because Euripides brought the spectator on to the stage, that is, everyday ordinary people were brought to participate in the spectacle; he also claims that because Euripides taught oratory to the public, he radically changed dramatic art: he democratized it. Public speech in general was thus rationalized by Euripides (and we know how radically anti-democratic Nietzsche was). This was seen by Nietzsche as a betrayal of the artist's high ideals: "Why should the artist be obliged to accommodate himself to a force which is strong only by virtue of its numbers?"⁷²

Among this concession to "spectators", Nietzsche emphasizes two of them: he argues that Euripides the poet made concessions to Euripides "the thinker" (as if there was an internal doubling, akin to Hegel's analysis of the

Nietzsche calls 'Apollo' and what he calls 'the daimonion of Socrates'. Different cultures are different ways of negotiating and renegotiating the terms of this 'alliance', probably a never-ending process. (Geuss, *Ibid*, p. xxx).

⁷⁰ *Ibid*, p. 54.

⁷¹ *Ibid*, p. 55.

⁷² *Ibid*, p. 57.

division between acting consciousness and judging consciousness, or even, more radically, Pessoa's heteronyms) and to Socrates himself. This is seen, according to Nietzsche, in Euripides' tendency to "moralize" his tragedies and to question the form, and even the content of the older tragedies of Aeschylus and Sophocles.⁷³

Now, Socrates was, according to Nietzsche, the spectator that "did not understand tragedy" in its older form; thus he saw fit to criticize it and, in this view, command the very form and content of Euripides' tragedies.

In fact, Nietzsche goes so far as to argue that with Euripides the ancient struggle between the Apolline and the Dionysiac is replaced by a struggle between the Dionysiac and the Socratic.⁷⁴

The result of this struggle, according to him, was the elimination of the Dionysiac elements for they were morally blamable. And this because, or so the argument goes, the Socratic stance entailed a conflation between the beautiful and the good; this is his definition of "aesthetic Socratism": "In order to be beautiful, everything must be reasonable".⁷⁵ Therefore, for Nietzsche, everything in Euripides' tragedies is touched by this overemphasized rationality. The introduction of the prologue is seen as a proof thereof. By explaining at the beginning of the play who he is, what preceded the action and even what will happen during the course of the action the audience is about to see, the character is undermining the tragic effect of the drama. In fact, Nietzsche argues, by adopting these procedures, all the *pathos* of tragic action is lost.

Paragraphs 13-14 of *The Birth of Tragedy* are testimony to a virulent attack *ad hominem* where Nietzsche, not content with criticizing Euripidean tragedy in the name of the lost Dionysiac elements, chooses to destroy the figure of Socrates. It is all Socrates' fault, he argues, because he was actually the one *writing* these tragedies. Nietzsche describes the ancient poets and creators such as Homer, Pindar, Aeschylus and so forth, as being capable of "the deepest abyss or

⁷³ Thus, says Nietzsche about Euripides: "And how dubious the solution of the ethical problems seemed to him! How questionable the treatment of the myths! How uneven the distribution of happiness and unhappiness! Even in the language of the older tragedy there was much that he found objectionable, or at least puzzling" (*Ibid.*, p. 59)

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 62. This emphasis on rationality can be seen for instance in Plato's early dialogue *Protagoras*, where Socrates seems to equate *arete* with knowledge, *episteme*. In *Protagoras* 361a-b it becomes clear that for Plato (or for Socrates, bearing in mind that this is an early dialogue) "all virtues are knowledge. See Plato, *Complete Works*, edited by John. M. Cooper (Indianapolis: Hackett, 1997, p. 789. See also Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 184.

the highest peak”⁷⁶ and Socrates as being, by contrast, a monster, a freak of nature, whose overdeveloped logical ability dissected and killed everything profound in the Greek culture around him.

This virulent attack is obviously exaggerated and lacking in historical accuracy, as is much else in Nietzsche’s works. Alexander Nehamas has argued two things about this: firstly, he claims that Socrates (and, to a lesser extent, Plato) was the hidden target of Nietzsche, because he was also considered as his fiercest adversary and rival⁷⁷; Nietzsche wanted to be the anti-Socrates, such as Pessoa wanted to be the supra-Camões. Secondly, he shows how Nietzsche’s style heavily relied on the figure of *hyperbole*⁷⁸ in order to make its points. As such, perhaps the best attitude we can adopt towards Nietzsche’s writings is to take them as being hyperbolic, many times historically inaccurate, but very often able to make interesting points that should be considered and discussed.

Namely, I do think that his depiction of the Dionysiac captured well the essence of the irrational phenomenon in Greece, its specific pathos and the way it revealed itself in poetry and the early tragedies. The opposition he makes between the Dionysiac and the Apolline is also probably inaccurate. In the 20th century, scholars like Dodds⁷⁹ and Giorgio Colli⁸⁰ have shown how there was a strong

⁷⁶ Nietzsche, *The Birth of Tragedy*, p. 66.

⁷⁷ Nehamas often insists in this point. Nietzsche felt Socrates was a rival because their tasks were similar; thus Nietzsche felt he had to escape him. See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1987), p. 30: “What is ambivalent in Nietzsche’s attitude toward Socrates is not his rage or his enmity: these are always there. What is necessarily ambivalent is his reaction to the gnawing question whether the protruding eyes that stare back at him when he squints at Socrates’ portrait may not be his own, whether in looking at Socrates he may not after all be looking into a mirror.”

⁷⁸ Nehamas, *op. cit.*, pp. 22-24.

⁷⁹ Dodds dedicates a whole chapter of his book to the topic of madness in ancient Greece (Dodds, *op. cit.* chapter three: “The blessings of madness”, pp. 64-101). He claims that there is a core of irrationality in the rites practiced by the Apolline Pythia (and even the Sybil). This seems to me to be undeniable. He traces back these types of ecstatic prophecy to western Asia; arguing that “Apollo was originally an Asiatic of some sort” (p. 69) he concludes that “the prophetic madness is at least as old in Greece as the religion of Apollo” (p. 70). However, Dodds also recognizes that there was a difference between Apolline and Dionysiac rituals, namely that whereas Dionysus offered freedom, Apollo promised security (p. 76).

⁸⁰ See the third chapter (“Il dio della divinazione”) of Giorgio Colli, *La Nascita della Filosofia* (Milano: Adelphi Edizioni, 1975), pp. 37-46. In this chapter, on “the god of divination”, Colli recalls the mystical character of Apollo. He situates this characteristic against the backdrop of pervasive irrationality in ancient Greek culture. In chapter one “La folia è la fonte della sapienza” (madness is the source of wisdom), pp. 11-22, he traces back this cult of madness to the ancient cults and connects it with the Pythia, in order to later emphasize its rationalized form in the platonic theoretical defense of *mania*. Finally, in chapter six “Misticismo e dialettica” (mysticism and dialectics), pp. 71-82, Colli examines the shift from the ancient mystical critiques to the instauration of dialectics as an art of discussion which would, eventually, transform the whole Greek cultural landscape.

element of irrationality in Apollo himself and, on the other hand, was not the presence of the *daimon* in Socrates' life sufficient proof that even him was not the reified figure of logic and rationality that Nietzsche pretended him to be? Rather, was he not the living proof of the paradoxical character of Greek culture, animated by this mix of reason and unreason?

Ultimately, a significant part of the importance of *The Birth of Tragedy* resides in its last paragraphs (§§16-25), where Nietzsche diagnoses what he perceives to be the crisis of 19th century Germany and its overemphasized rationalistic culture. Part of the solution to this state of affairs, he argues, would be to recover the Greeks ancient tragic worldview which is, evidently, based on conflict. This attempt to put forward a social philosophy which makes of conflict one of its guiding elements resonates with similar attempts (albeit with very different diagnoses and results) by Marx, Habermas and Honneth, which will be further specified below.

Ricœur also comments on Greek tragedy many times throughout his published work. Two of the most important occasions in which he does so provide some of the hermeneutical keys for his books: namely, his comments on the Oedipus myth in *Freud and Philosophy* and his analysis of Antigone in *Oneself as Another*. I will briefly mention these two analyses, but I do not want to anticipate too much their discussion, which I will leave for later chapters. However, I do wish to mention right now the way in which Ricœur saw a fundamental place for the Greek tragic *Weltanschauung* in his earlier work.

The second part of the *Symbolism of Evil* is dedicated to analyzing the myths of the beginning of cosmos in several different cultures; chapter two of this second part is called "The Wicked God and the 'Tragic' Vision of Existence". In this chapter Ricœur starts by asserting that the name of the chapter was chosen precisely because of the existence of Greek tragedy, and by claiming that in spite of the existence of other "tragedies" (Christian, Elizabethan, modern), Greek tragedy is not one particular case among others but rather its essence. For Ricœur, the Greek tragic is "its origin – that is to say, both its beginning and its authentic emergence."⁸¹ It is also noteworthy that by choosing to name the chapter the "tragic vision of existence" he is also deciding to take Greek tragedy not only as a

⁸¹ Ricœur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 211.

particular art form that attained excellence in its Attic form, but as providing a whole vision of existence.

To explain the origin of this world vision, Ricœur takes a step back and roots it in what he calls the “pre-tragic themes”, namely the cosmogony and Theogony to which I alluded at the beginning of this chapter. There is a connection, Ricœur argues, between the myth of chaos in the drama of creation and the tragic vision.⁸² He also mentions the utter helplessness of the Homeric heroes when faced with Zeus, the Erinyes or the *Moirai*; these are, he argues, expressions of non-personalized power that override personal choice⁸³; moreover, the *Moirai* is precisely the most impersonal aspect of that power: man is seen as having been granted a “lot” to which he must conform. This is the reason why the *hybris* will be so harshly punished. The Gods are jealous (*phthonos*) of any human greatness. Allow me to quote in passing the strong, magnificent tragic words of Sophocles in *Antigone*, precisely when depicting the destruction brought upon human beings because of them having committed *hybris*. These words are perhaps the most penetrating account of the tragic world vision.

For time approaching, and time hereafter,
And time forgotten, one rule stands:
That greatness never
Shall touch the life of man without destruction.

Hope goes fast and far: to many it carries comfort,
To many it is but the trick of light-witted desire –
Blind we walk, till the unseen flame has trapped our footsteps.
For old anonymous wisdom has left us a saying
‘Of a mind that God leads to destruction
The sign is this – that in the end
Its good is evil.’
Not long shall that mind evade destruction.⁸⁴

⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁸⁴ I am here following Dodd’s translation of verses 611 of *Antigone*; See Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, *op. cit.*, p. 50.

Now, Ricœur's depiction of tragedy in 1960 reflects precisely his own problematic at the time, and which is echoed in the words of Sophocles just quoted – evil. When, Ricœur asks, is the tragic problem born? It is born, according to him, when there is a conflict between heroic greatness and the predestination to evil⁸⁵; this clearly presupposes an understanding of freedom much different from our own. The tragic hero implicitly *believes* in the positive outcome of his own action but over and over again we are shown that he cannot escape his own fate. His hybris is at the same time an expression of evil, that of going against the grain, against the order of things. Ricœur here speaks of a dialectics between fate and freedom⁸⁶; we face a hostile transcendence; human freedom is squashed, but from the angle of the audience, the affirmation of freedom in the heroic actions delays the fulfilment of fate (to the point of sometimes seeming contingent) and this is the reason there is a tragic drama. The spectacle depends on this tension. Thus, even though fate is inescapable, to the eyes of the audience, it might appear as a surprise. As Ricœur puts it: “the unstable mixture of certainty and surprise is turned to terror by the drop of transcendent perfidy that tragic theology lets fall on it”.⁸⁷ Perhaps the most significant example of this annihilation by transcendence due to human hybris is given to us in the myth of Prometheus. As Ricœur contends, Prometheus embodies destructive freedom, in that he has the secret that would allow the fall of Zeus (his union with a mortal woman would result in the birth of the son who could dethrone him). This kind of power is seen, in Greek culture, as deserving punishment. The reason for this might also be the need to reaffirm being as it is: such a threat to the order of things contains, in itself, the power to unleash chaos over against cosmos; and this is something which the Greek mind does not seem prepared to accept, in spite of all the irrational elements present within it.

It has been widely stated, following Aristotle, that there was a function to the Greek tragic spectacle. This function was *catharsis*, a sort of identification with the fate of the tragic hero, and an emotional discharge that allowed the spectators to suffer with the tragic hero without however being directly affected by it in their own lives. This was thus the result of a sort of pity, as well as a certain reconciliation with the order of things as they stood.

⁸⁵ Ricœur, *Symbolism of Evil*, p. 218.

⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 220.

⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

There is, to be sure, and Ricœur notes it in passing, a difference in the tragedies of the different tragic writers. This is evident in the distinction between, for instance, Sophocles and Euripides, as Nietzsche contended. But Ricœur insists on another difference, the one between Sophocles and Aeschylus. According to Ricœur, Aeschylus envisions the end of the tragic itself: even though the hero is volatilized (like Orestes in the *Eumenides*) there seems to be an affirmation that Zeus is not wicked after all.⁸⁸ But Ricœur also emphasizes that for Sophocles the tragic is at its height. Analyzing for the first time *Antigone*, he claims that it is a tragedy of “insoluble contradiction”.⁸⁹ Whereas Aeschylus, in the *Eumenides*, saw the city as the locus of a possible reconciliation, the contradiction between law of the city and divine law reaches its height in *Antigone*.

As such, what is the possible reconciliation provided by Greek tragedy? It is only a reconciliation with the order of things as they exist; Ricœur invokes the “suffering for the sake of understanding” that we find in Aeschylus’ *Agamemnon*; thus we find a positive function for suffering: suffering relieves us from hybris by showing us things as they are. And Ricœur invokes Jaspers in order to claim that this is precisely the meaning of “tragic wisdom”. Now, this is perhaps one of the true meanings of catharsis: we also suffer because we have been proven wrong, and we see how the tragic hero lost his life because of it. But the positive result is a better understanding of what is. This is perhaps an early version of Spinoza’s consenting to necessity.

Ultimately, Ricœur believes that Greek religion does not or cannot provide a full reconciliation to tragedy. Apollo is the great counsellor, but he cannot forgive sins, only wash away the defilement by means of ritual purification; Dionysus provides us with an escape from ourselves, a temporary freedom from responsibility, but no total reconciliation either. The only reconciliation provided by tragedy is precisely the one which the spectacle brings about: “it is we who are frightened and lament, because we have put ourselves into the scene”⁹⁰

That the tragic hero is potentially each and everyone of us, that he is in itself a symbol of our own condition, is given an even clearer meaning five years

⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 228.

⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

after *The Symbolism of Evil*, when Ricœur publishes *Freud and Philosophy*. In this book, he dedicates special attention to the Oedipus myth taken as an overdetermined symbol. In fact, for Ricœur in 1965, the Oedipus myth contains the kernel of both the origins of our conscience (through a Freudian, psychoanalytic reading) and the possibility for the future meaning of it, if we read it as a teleological tragedy of truth unveiled. A fuller account of this stage of the Ricoeurian hermeneutics of the self can be found in part four of this thesis, chapter 4.3.

In *Oneself as Another*, on the other hand, Ricœur takes up once again *Antigone* in what could be called a didactic manner. Indeed, his strategy is to use the myth in order to show how it can serve as an allegory for daily situations of conflicts of duties, whose solution and outcome can only be reached through a “judgment in situation”, that is, some sort of *phronesis* that does not apply a universal rule to a specific case but rather invents the rule to solve the difficulties in a case-by-case scenario; because, as he will argue, some conflicts of duties are inescapable, such as the conflict between law of the city and divine law that he chooses to emphasize in *Antigone*. Once again, I will leave a fuller discussion of this for a later chapter.⁹¹ But this persistence of the analysis of Greek tragedies throughout his work is sufficient proof of the unwavering influence of the tragic vision stemming from the Greek source; indeed, the Greeks appear to him as the best example of the capacity of *suffering*, one of the main poles of the expression “the acting and suffering human being” which he often chose to encapsulate his philosophical anthropology.

In the 20th century, other scholars besides Ricœur put forth strong evaluations concerning the positive value of tragedy and the tragic. George Steiner, for instance, seemed to echo Nietzsche’s concern over the demise of tragedy due to the effects of an overtly rationalistic Western society. Enlightenment, so the claim went, killed the metaphysics that made tragedy possible. This early view of Steiner, expressed in *The Death of Tragedy*⁹² in 1961 was subject to much criticism.⁹³ And indeed Steiner was forced to come back

⁹¹ In this case a fuller account can be found in part five, section 5.2, “the conflict of duties”.

⁹² George Steiner, *The Death of Tragedy* (Yale: Yale University Press, 1996).

⁹³ See for instance Thomas Van Laan treatment of the subject. Laan traces the history of what he calls the “Death-of-Tragedy Myth” in the 20th century, through Steiner and many other scholars, and he argues that believing that tragedy is dead prevents us from understanding and grasping the

many times to re-evaluate his assessment of Greek tragedies, a topic which never ceased to haunt him.

Recently, in a paper titled “‘Tragedy’ reconsidered”⁹⁴, Steiner added a further clarification. He conceded that the words “tragedy” and “tragic” are “an elusive branch of tangled ramifications” and that it might be that we do not know what we are talking about when we use these words⁹⁵ but he chose to center his own working definition of tragedy as being based on the notion of an “original sin” or “dis-grace”. The tragic man is a fallen man.⁹⁶ Now, in this reading, instead of focussing the “essence” of tragedy in the Greek world, Steiner chooses to locate some other loci in which something akin to the “Greek tragic” might take place. In *The Death of Tragedy* he had chosen to emphasize that tragedy was almost absent from the Hebraic source, except for the book of Job. In 2004 he instead underlines that the Judeo-Christian and Pauline myth of the disobedience and inherited guilt of Adam have a strikingly tragic tone. And the next step in his argument is to retrace other occasions in the history of our culture where models appeared that impute to our history or pre-history a fault that made things worse: he cites Marx’s *1844 Manuscripts* and Marxism in general as reproducing such a model: something fatal occurred as soon as our relation to others ceased to be one of trust and love, and was transferred to property and money relations. He accordingly also sees in Freud, Lévi-Strauss and Rousseau other examples of our fall from original innocence; a fall that deserves the epithet “tragic”.

This is Steiner’s definition of the “tragic sense of life”: an ontological fall from grace. But in 2004 he seems much more willing to concede that this metaphysical or even theological dimension of tragedy is in permanent interaction with the work of (at least some) philosophers, like Kierkegaard, Nietzsche and Benjamin. He goes so far as to state that Rousseau’s and Marx’s descriptions of alienation presuppose an “ontological weight” that concedes them their gravity.⁹⁷ Likewise, he is willing to see in Shakespeare or Goethe reminiscences of the tragic sense of life. The whole article, which displays Steiner’s immense erudition, is an

specific viewpoint of authors such as Ibsen or Tennessee Williams. See Thomas F. Van Laan, “The Death-of-Tragedy Myth” in *Journal of Dramatic Theory and Criticism* vol. V, 2 (1991): 5-31.

⁹⁴ George Steiner, “‘Tragedy’ reconsidered” in *New Literary History* 35/1 (Winter 2004): 1-15.

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 1.

⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

⁹⁷ George Steiner, “‘Tragedy’ reconsidered”, p. 4.

intricate and very condensed report of the many tragic aspects that we can find in the several art forms of the last few centuries. All these cultural productions convey, he argues, “an aristocracy of suffering, an excellence of pain”⁹⁸ even though, all in all, “there are very few absolute tragedies”.⁹⁹ Steiner cites Aeschylus’ *Seven Against Thebes* or Sophocles’ *Antigone* or Euripides’ *The Bacchae* as some of the few examples of the latter category. He takes the final scene of *The Bacchae* as the most striking example of the disproportionate punishment inflicted on the city.

Thus Steiner’s current diagnosis seems to be that even though we can no longer really find *absolute tragedies* (and he mentions the influence of Christian optimism as one reason for it), even though their purest expression can only be found in some of the tragedies produced in the Attic fifth century B.C., we can still find vestiges of the tragic throughout later history and even in our day and age. The theatre of the absurd, for instance, is one of the expressive forms it assumed in the twentieth century.

Ricœur would probably disagree with Steiner’s insistence on the metaphysics of the original sin; for Ricœur, fault / guilt are only secondary phenomena; he adopts a fundamentally Kantian stance towards the problem of evil. Evil can be radical, but it is not originary. And even though there might have been a fall, it is not irremediable. Thus, although he emphasizes tragic wisdom, he eventually remains an optimist.

Ultimately, what is the core of the tragic vision of the world? It is probably some sort of metaphysic pessimism, one that displays human beings as being radically overcome by powers that are far stronger than we are. These can be Gods, or fate itself. Tragedy can display, as in the case of *The Bacchae* and its strong, thick description of Maenadism, the limits of rationality and the possibility of overwhelming experiences of ecstasy. These ecstatic experiences, in turn, reveal how little self-control human beings ultimately have; they make explicit what we can call the conflict between the rational and the irrational elements of our self. This conflict will be given a deeply metaphoric sense in the philosophy of Plato.

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

But other conflicts are apparent too, such as the tension between human will and the inescapable necessity, *ananke*. Oedipus wants to know the truth, and yet when he does he is crushed by it. He is doomed, literally. Creon wants to impose his law, and yet divine law opposes him. As such, the experience of conflict is, for the Greek main tragic characters, an experience of failure and utter destruction. It is, properly speaking, *tragic*. Part three of this dissertation will analyze in further detail inner conflict; however, a word about Plato is needed, because it is with him and Socrates that for the first time philosophy asks specific ethical questions, questions about how ought we to live, and thus makes explicit how different courses of action are possible, how they are ethically qualified, and to what extent their causes (even though not necessarily their motives) can be rational or irrational.

1.1.4 – Plato and the conflict between the irrational and the rational souls

Before we delve into Plato's depiction of the struggle between the rational and the irrational souls, let me start by recalling that the birth of philosophy in its technical sense, with Socrates and Plato, took place in a context that was in itself embattled. I have been mentioning how there was a strong clash between rationalism and irrationalism in Greek culture; by the time of Socrates and Plato, a new alternative had developed, putting forward a new kind of *paideia* and upheld by what could be called in somewhat anachronistic terms a new professional group. These were, of course, the Sophists, and it is against both their ideas and practices that we can grasp the significance of the Socratic phenomenon.

In a nutshell, the type of *paideia* upheld by the Sophists was technical and instrumental in a strict sense. Some of them boasted the capacity to teach anything to anyone. In the Greek world, they were the closest we can find to the figure of the modern intellectual or, better put, the modern Professor, he who teaches for a living and therefore gets paid for it. They cannot, of course, be considered a coherent movement or a school; many of them defended different ideas. However, there is a certain tone that can be discerned and that encompasses many of them: the insistence on the instrumental character of knowledge (after all, they insist, *arete* can be taught) results in a certain relativistic stance. This is clear in Protagoras (man as "the measure of all things") and taken to an extreme in

Gorgias's nihilism. As such, we can understand Plato's metaphysics as an attempt to put forward substantive ideals (even though, evidently, in a problematic manner expressed in dialectical form) over against the relativistic and instrumental stance of the Sophists. Hence his insistence on the search for truth *qua* truth and on the need to find stable, never changing ideals, which "neither wax nor wane".¹⁰⁰

This context has been dealt with in depth by Werner Jaeger, who dedicates the third volume of his magnificent *Paideia* to what he calls "the conflict of cultural ideals in the age of Plato".¹⁰¹ His insistence, for instance, on the rhetoric ideal put forward by Isocrates as an alternative to Plato and his school deserves some attention. I will come back to it in the next section.

I will evidently not provide a full picture of Platonic philosophy; it is impossible to do so here. However, I do want to explicate how this conflict between the rational and the irrational that we have been tracing in Greek culture fits within the brightest and most complex philosophy of the ancient world.

Let me start by recalling that Plato's writings almost always reveal an ambiguity that constitutively opens them to a conflict of interpretations. It is always difficult to know whether or not in certain passages he is being ironical. As to what his beliefs on the "human soul" are, as Dodds points out, "it is not always easy to decide where Plato is expressing a personal faith and where he is merely using a traditional language".¹⁰²

This caution notwithstanding, allow me to delve on the significance of Plato's poetic depiction of the human soul, such as we can find it in the *Phaedrus*.¹⁰³ I will offer a brief comment on Plato's apology of madness (*mania*) which we can find in *Phaedrus* 244a – 245b, as well as on the famous Chariot Allegory which succeeds it (246a – 254e). As often in Plato's dialogues, his own

¹⁰⁰ This is probably the most strong and beautiful description of the world of Ideas, such as we can find in the words of Diotima in the *Symposium*: "First, it always *is* and neither comes to be nor passes away, neither waxes nor wanes." Plato, *Symposium* in *Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, 211a, p. 493.

¹⁰¹ Werner Jaeger, *Paideia, The Ideals of Greek Culture. Volume III: The Conflict of Cultural Ideals in the Age of Plato*, translated by Gilbert Highet (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1944).

¹⁰² Dodds, *op. cit.*, pp. 207-208.

¹⁰³ See Plato, *Phaedrus* in *Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, pp. 506-546. The *Phaedrus*, which was considered by Schleiermacher as being a programmatic dialogue, and so one of Plato's most important dialogues, is usually taken to belong to the mature period. It is roughly comprised of two parts, the first one encompassing the Eros speeches, including the Chariot Allegory and the appraisal of *mania*, whereas the second part deals more intensely with rhetoric, and the dialectical method. For a good presentation of the *Phaedrus*, and of the relation between philosophy and rhetoric in it, see Werner Jaeger, *Paideia vol. III*, chapter eighth "Plato's *Phaedrus*: Philosophy and Rhetoric", pp. 182-196.

standpoint is presented through the words of Socrates. So it is in a long discourse of Socrates that we will find Plato's claims concerning madness and the inner conflict within the human soul.

The ground for these claims is laid in 244a, when Socrates explicitly claims: "but in fact the best things we have come from madness, when it is given as a gift of the god."¹⁰⁴ This is reasserted afterwards, with Socrates saying "(...) madness (*mania*) from a god is finer than self-control of human origin, according to the testimony of the ancient language givers".¹⁰⁵ Plato then proceeds to distinguish a typology of the types of madness sent by the god, stating that "the right kind of madness finds relief from present hardships"¹⁰⁶, i.e., actually has a therapeutic function. The higher type of madness is taken to be "possession by the Muses", that is, poetic madness in which the poet "awakens to a Bacchic frenzy of songs and poetry". In contrast, verses written by anyone with expert knowledge and self-control "will be eclipsed by the poetry of men who have been driven out of their minds."¹⁰⁷

It is after this prelude in the form of warning that Plato proposes to show us "the truth about the nature of the soul".¹⁰⁸ But as often in his works, the "truth" is put forward by recurring to a myth or, better put, to an allegory. The exuberance of Socrates' discourse is in here at its peak. Souls are described as being winged, and immortal; they are driven by desire: "All soul looks after all that lacks a soul"¹⁰⁹. The analogy is assumed as such: "Let us then liken the soul to the natural union of a team of winged horses and their charioteer"¹¹⁰

However, as is often the case in Plato, man is described as having a "mixed" nature. Unlike gods, who possess horses and charioteers that are themselves "all good" because they "come from a good stock", we ourselves have a situation in which our driver has to deal with two very different sorts of horses: "one of his horses is beautiful and good (...) while the other is the opposite (...)".¹¹¹ So we have a good horse and a bad horse; in symbolic terms, a white

¹⁰⁴ Plato, *Phaedrus* 244a, p. 522.

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 244d, p. 523.

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, 244e, p. 523.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, 245a, p. 523.

¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, 245c, p. 523.

¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, 246c, p. 524.

¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, 246a, p. 524.

¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, 246b, p. 524.

horse and a black horse. But the result of this mixture is the drama of human existence: “This means that chariot-driving in our case is inevitably a painfully difficult business.”¹¹²

At some points in Socrates’ discourse, the violence of this orientation is emphasized: “Another soul rises at one time and falls at another, and because its horses pull it violently in different directions, it sees some real things and misses others”.¹¹³ As we can see, Plato’s depiction points towards a tripartition of the soul: two horses and a charioteer. After having given the historical details of the myth, describing how souls tend towards beauty and are driven by love (Eros), and the intricate process of reincarnations they are engaged in, the superiority of the philosophical life and so on, we come to the end of the allegory and find a more detailed description of each of the soul’s three parts. It might be that these correspond to the division of the soul presented in the *Republic*¹¹⁴, namely, that between reasoning (*logos*), spirited (*thumos*) and appetitive (*epithumia*) parts of the soul. However, the analogy might not be complete because the way these “parts of the soul” behave in the allegory is not completely straightforward. In a way, the *Phaedrus* has a more embattled description than the *Republic*, because whereas the *Republic* looks at the conduction of our soul in different moments (sometimes driven by appetites, other times by reason, etc.), the *Phaedrus* looks at the conflict *medias in res*, as it is happening, and offers a very violent – albeit mythical and poetic – illustration of it. Allow me to quote the long, final passage of this allegory, in order to show how our inner drama unfolds in Plato:

The horse that is on the right, or nobler, side is upright in frame and well jointed, with a high neck and a regal nose; his coat is white, his eyes are black, and he is a lover of honor with modesty and self-control; companion to true glory, he needs no whip, and is guided by verbal commands alone. The other horse is a crooked great jumble of limbs with a short bull-neck, a pug nose, black skin and bloodshot white eyes; companion to wild boasts and indecency, he is shaggy around the ears – deaf as post – and just barely yields to horsewhip and goad combined. Now when the charioteer looks in the eye of love, his entire soul is suffused with a sense of warmth and starts to fill with tingles and the goading of desire. As for the horses, the one who is obedient to the charioteer is still

¹¹² *Ibid.*

¹¹³ *Ibid.*, 248a, p. 526.

¹¹⁴ See Plato, *Republic*, book IV in *Complete Works*, 435a-442e, pp. 1066-1074.

controlled, then as always, by its sense of shame, and so prevents itself from jumping on the boy. The other one, however, no longer responds to the whip or the goad of the charioteer; it leaps violently forward and does everything to aggravate its yokemate and its charioteer, trying to make them go up to the boy and suggest to him the pleasures of sex.¹¹⁵

The rest of this narrative describes the ongoing struggle between these three parties (the charioteer and the white-coated horse versus the black horse), with the charioteer eventually winning, but at the cost of violently having to repress the black horse's instincts: "[the charioteer] violently yanks the bit back out of the teeth of the insolent horse (...) so that he bloodies its foul-speaking tongue and jaws, sets its legs and haunches firmly on the ground, and 'gives it over to pain'."¹¹⁶

Now, let us assume the traditional stance and acknowledge that the charioteer embodies, up to a certain point, the interests of reason. What is interesting to note is that he eventually wins, but not without exerting significant violence. G. Ferrari comments that even though the black horse is supposed to stand for brutish, inhibited lust, it seeks to persuade the charioteer, while it is the charioteer who resorts to violence.¹¹⁷ Allow me to pursue this line of reasoning, by commenting that the use of reason is accompanied by an exercise of power. The charioteer eventually reins in the black horse, but this dominance over inner nature is tantamount to repression. And even though there is a party that wins, we cannot overlook the inner tension that remains.

Divine *mania* can in fact be attributed to the behaviour of all the parties. Because the charioteer himself has desires; he too is attracted by beauty. However, what Plato is upholding certainly is none other than a right ordering of desires, such as it leads us to correct behaviour. He has in mind the "right" kind of devotion towards beauty and the Beautiful, through living a properly philosophical life. But this too entails a kind of *mania*, a *philosophia*, such as it is so well

¹¹⁵ Plato, *Phaedrus*, 253d-254a, p. 531.

¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, 254e.

¹¹⁷ See G. R. F. Ferrari, *Listening to the Cicadas. A Study of Plato's Phaedrus* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1987), p. 186: "Although the charioteer seems to stand for the control of reason and the bad horse for brutish, uninhibited lust, in the struggle between the two it is the bad horse who adopts persuasive language and the methods of reason, while the charioteer maintains control by sheer strength and wordless violence."

described in the *Phaedrus*, the *Symposium*, the *Republic* and elsewhere. It seems as if a certain curbing of “irrational” or “brute” desires is needed, in order to let one let be guided by “nobler”, “higher” objects, as we can see in Diotima’s discourse in the symposium. Or, in fact, this can all be attributed to a type of instrumental, rational-purposive behaviour. Establishing means to attain different types of goals.

E. R. Dodds, who in his *The Greeks and the Irrational* has a chapter precisely called “Plato and the Irrational Soul” hints at what I am trying to emphasize here: that Plato offers us a model of inner conflict. Dodds sees the best example of this in the tale of Leontius, which we find in the *Republic*:

Leontius, the son of Aglaion, was going up from the Piraeus along the outside of the North Wall when he saw some corpses lying at the executioner’s feet. He had an appetite to look at them but at the same time he was disgusted and turned away. For a time he struggled with himself and covered his face, but, finally, overpowered by the appetite, he pushed his eyes wide open and rushed towards the corpses, saying, “Look for yourselves, you evil wretches, take your fill of the beautiful sight.”¹¹⁸

This is an interesting story, because it offers a meaningful counterexample to the chariot allegory. In Leontius, the inner conflict is won by the appetitive part of the soul. However, as Dodds also recalls, Plato’s take on this example is that of a moral condemnation.¹¹⁹ In the *Sophist*, this outcome is diagnosed as a kind of “sickness of the soul”.¹²⁰

Ultimately, and like so many other theories in Plato, there is a fundamental ambiguity of Plato’s diagnosis of inner conflict or discord. On the one hand, it seems to be inevitable and pertain to human condition, on the other hand it is taken as sickness. Perhaps it is sickness only if we let the “bad horse” win, but is also not clear why this should be so. Finally, the appraisal of madness and the emphasis on reason are also partly contradictory and ambiguous. Or perhaps we should say that they are dialectical.

¹¹⁸ Plato, *The Republic*, 439e-440a, p. 1071.

¹¹⁹ Dodds, *The Greeks and the Irrational*, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

¹²⁰ Plato, *The Sophist*, in *Complete Works*, *op. cit.*, 228b, p. 248: “there’s dissension in the souls of people of poor condition, between beliefs and desires, anger and pleasures, reason and pains, and all of those things with each other (...) So we’d be right if we said that wickedness is discord and sickness of the soul.” See also Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 213.

In the last analysis, it seems to me that Plato in a sense encapsulates the whole Greek world, and that his works are the tipping point in which the “inherited conglomerate” (as Dodds calls it) of ancient beliefs (namely, the *irrational* ones) finally give in to rationality. Or, better put, that there is a fundamental tension between that inherited conglomerate, still fully present in Plato, and the move towards rationalization. In a way, that tension is gone in Aristotle who very clearly chose reason’s side. And this is why Plato is probably the most interesting ancient philosopher for a study on conflict. The very presence of an interesting mixture of myth and philosophy in his works is a testimony to this assessment.

The condemnation of “instincts” or “appetites” will be recurrent in the history of philosophy. Leontius’ tale will have an Augustinian counterpart in the story of Alypius and the circus games, and the humbling of the black horse will be given a more formalized version in Kant’s humiliation of self-love through respect for the moral law. All this is conflict, inner, psychological conflict, given a philosophical and/or theological and/or moral solution. But in all of this there is an aspect of inner violence, of repression. Reason and violence can sometimes go together, as Critical Theorists will often emphasize, and as we shall see in the first chapters of part two. In a nutshell: reason “wins”. But this comes at a price.

1.1.5 – Agonistic political citizenship and public space

With Plato, we have seen the tipping point of the inherited conglomerate of unreason being won over by rationality. However, this is all seen at a micro level. Up until now, we have followed the thread of conflict in different Greek cultural phenomena, from epic poetry to tragedy and philosophy. However, I will still have to say a word about, let us call it, *political* conflict, not in the form of wars or competing factions, but rather in the competition between fellow citizens. In order to do this, we will have to take a short detour through the ancient agonistic practices, and the role philosophy played in these practices.

The art of dialectic, such as we can find it in Plato, is already a *written* word, proper to hermeneutics. However, something akin to dialectics was already practiced in other forms prior or contemporary to Plato; namely, in live, face-to-face, competitive discussion. In chapter six of his *La nascita della filosofia*,

Giorgio Colli analyzes the transition from mysticism to dialectics (or, if we want to put it as I have been putting it from irrationality to rationality). He defines it as a “real discussion”, an “art of discussion”, an exchange between two living people.¹²¹ Dialectics as a meaningful exchange, a competitive dialogue can be traced back to Zeno of Elea, if not even (as Colli argues) to Parmenides himself, insofar as there was a possibility for non-Being even within the affirmation of Being. This art of dialectics made its way through Gorgias, with his treatise on non-existence (or non-being) and to Plato himself.

A detailed historical account of the origins of dialectics as this art of discussion, and the many possible arguments and forms contained within it can be found in Aristotle’s *Topics*¹²², which are part of his *Organon*. Nonetheless, and evidently, Aristotle’s reconstruction is already an historical, detached account, more worried about the logical possibilities entailed in the discussion than in the competition itself. Colli, however, has an interesting working hypothesis. He claims that dialectics was born as an offspring of agonism. According to him, when the religious background started waning, the competition no longer required men to have divination powers and so a whole new field was opened up: that of an all too human agonism.¹²³ He also sees in dialectics the birth of the effort of universalization and abstraction, i.e., the search for categories as universal predicates. Thus Aristotle’s (and all subsequent) table(s) of categories would be the development of the earlier art, the one born with Zeno.

Colli’s further claim is that there is an intrinsic cruelty in these procedures.¹²⁴ The argument serves only as mediation to a postponed victory, which is there only for the enjoyment of the dialectician. Dialectics, especially in the hands of Gorgias, assumed a destructive purpose. Its consequence is that whichever claim one takes to be true can be refuted.¹²⁵ According to this claim, dialectics was therefore the precursor of nihilism and relativism; ancient dialectics was, as such, a devastating weapon. Its further evolution would transform it from an agonistic technique into a general theory of *logos*.

¹²¹ Colli, *op. cit.*, p. 71.

¹²² Aristotle, *Topics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, volume I* (The Revised Oxford Translation), (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1984) edited by Jonathan Barnes, pp. 167-277.

¹²³ Colli, *op. cit.*, p. 75.

¹²⁴ Colli, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

¹²⁵ Colli, *op. cit.*, p. 86.

A different application of *agon* was to be found in rhetoric. Whereas in dialectics there was some sort of direct, one on one duel, in rhetoric every speaker is potentially in competition with all other speakers, i.e., with a universal audience. This leads Colli to believe that everything about this art form is agonistic, conflictual.¹²⁶ The matter is even more serious, and manipulation sought at an higher level, because its stakes revolve around political power while in ancient dialectics the dispute centered on knowledge.

Ultimately, rhetoric and its instrumental use (represented by the major figures of the sophistical movement) provided philosophy with its main rival. This was true already in the fourth century B.C., with Socrates' and Plato's definition of philosophy coming precisely from a bitter polemic against the Sophists. Of these, Isocrates most clearly provided an alternative notion of *paideia*. His emphasis is the importance of rhetoric and practical politics.¹²⁷

And the truth of the matter is that both dialectics and rhetoric played a huge role in Greek cultural and political life. They were instrumental in democratic Athens and elsewhere. And in fact, a few modern or contemporary philosophers saw in ancient Greece a model of agon with which we should renew. Agonism can, in fact be useful in a democratic manner, and in the making of a political and social philosophy. Let me now turn to two reconstructions of Greek agon and their respective relations – one pejorative, another highly appraising – with the democratic ideals and practices. I will come back to Nietzsche's assessment of Socrates, and then mention Hannah Arendt's political philosophy, and with these assessments our brief incursion in the Greek source will be complete.

We have seen above Nietzsche's reconstruction of Greek tragedy and his attack on Socrates. In a later work, *Twilight of the Idols*, Nietzsche once again delivered devastating blows to the figure of Socrates¹²⁸. However, this time around, he curiously credits him with having been responsible for the discovery of a new type of *agon*, namely dialectical *agon*. This assessment is historically inaccurate since, as we shown above, dialectics can be traced back to Zeno.

¹²⁶ Colli, chapter eighth, "Agonismo e Retorica", pp. 97 ff.

¹²⁷ On Isocrates, see chapters two "The rhetoric of Isocrates and its Cultural Ideal (pp. 46-70) and six "Isocrates defends his Paideia" (pp. 132-155) of Werner Jaeger's *Paideia. Volume III, op. cit.*

¹²⁸ Nietzsche, *Twilight of the Idols* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2005), especially "The problem of Socrates", §§1-12, pp. 162-166.

However, according to Nietzsche, Socrates' emphasis on dialectics explains why he was so fascinating for the Athenian citizens of his time: "He fascinated by appealing to the agonistic drive of the Greeks – he introduced a variation into the wrestling matches between young men and youths. Socrates was a great *erotic* too."¹²⁹ However, this depiction is done not with admiration but scorn.

Nietzsche sees in the Greeks an ideal of *health* and *strength*. In his idealized reconstruction, ancient Greece was the homeplace of the strong and the beautiful. Now, for him, in his rather crass – and exaggerated, even if only for stylistic purposes – physiological interpretation of Socrates and his legendary ugliness, Socrates was indeed the anti-Greek: "ugliness, an objection in itself, was almost a refutation for the Greeks"¹³⁰

Nietzsche sees in Socrates' appearance a supposed insight into his alleged corrupted essence: *monstrum in fronte, monstrum in animo*. In this respect, curiously enough, Kierkegaard has a suppler reading which is the exact opposite of Nietzsche's.¹³¹ This is evident also in the way they interpret differently Socrates' last words in the *Phaedo*, when he claims owing Asclepius (taken to be the God of medicine) a rooster.¹³² This alleged sacrifice is interpreted by Nietzsche as a sign of debt towards the God, for having done Socrates the favour of lifting the burden of life from his shoulders. Thus Socrates and, to a lesser extent Plato, are for Nietzsche the sick, decadent doomsayers, those who condemn life.

And what was Socrates' fault, according to Nietzsche? Here we have to be reminded of Nietzsche's blatant anti-democratic taste. In fact, if he saw in Greece an ideal to be upheld, this was mainly in his own reconstruction of archaic Greece (or maybe in Sparta in the classical period) an ideal of *noble* taste and behaviour – in the sense of *strength*, evidently. What is Socrates accused of? Of bringing *democracy* to agonistic disputes, by allegedly introducing dialectics and emphasis on reason – *logon didonai*:

¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, §8, p. 165.

¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, §3, p. 163.

¹³¹ Kierkegaard, *The Concept of Irony, with Continual Reference to Socrates*, translated by Howard Hong and Edna Hong (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1989).

¹³² Plato, *Phaedo*, in *Complete Works*, 118a, p. 100: "As his belly was getting cold Socrates uncovered his head – he had covered it – and said – these were his last words – 'Crito, we owe a cock to Asclepius; make this offering to him and do not forget'".

With Socrates, Greek taste suddenly changed in favour of dialectics; what really happened here? Above all, a *noble* taste was defeated; with dialectics, the rabble rises to the top. Before Socrates, dialectical manners were rejected in good society: they were seen as bad manners, they humiliated people. The young were warned against them. People were generally distrustful of reasons being displayed like this. Honourable things, like honourable people, do not go around with their reasons in their hand.¹³³

Therefore, in this depiction, Socrates is the plebeian who, because of his overwhelming *ressentiment*, took revenge on his noble counterparts by dialectically humiliating them.

Ultimately, the reason for Socrates' success, Nietzsche claims, was his being able to provide an apparent solution for the decadent anarchy of instincts that was starting to take a hold of Greece already in the 4th century B.C. Socrates' response, or so the claim goes, is to turn reason into a tyrant, into an *overarching instinct*, so as to override and master all other instincts. Thus Reason = virtue = happiness, seen as Socrates' diagnosis and proposed cure to Greek illnesses, came to pass, states Nietzsche, as their apparent last resort.¹³⁴

Nietzsche's last word on Socrates in this virulent attack is to conclude that Socrates was a deceiver – a self-deceiver, and a deceiver of his counterparts. He was not the doctor – even though he wanted to be so, and he convinced others that he was indeed one – but the sick man, and this is why he gladly accepts the poisoned drink.¹³⁵ “To *have* to fight the instincts – that is the formula for decadence.”¹³⁶

What can we say about Nietzsche's musings? That they are yet another testimony to the agonistic power of the Greek cultural source (and this, once again, independently of Nietzsche's historical accuracy or lack thereof). Many of Nietzsche's views are of course unacceptable for our own democratic taste. His own pessimism of strength and his attack on the “morality of *ressentiment*”, slave morality and so on, as well as the emphasis put on “the noble mentality” and the affirmation of strength that we find in the will to power, probably leads him to a valorization of *agon* that we can not follow. The result of his rendering of Greek

¹³³ *Ibid.*, §5, pp. 163-164.

¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, §10, p. 166.

¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, §12, p. 166.

¹³⁶ *Ibid.*, §11, p. 166.

agon is probably closest to violence, to the squashing of the feeble and the meek, than we can allow for, at least if we take him at face value and do not concede that some times, other than exaggeration, there is irony in Nietzsche too – and so that what he is *really* wanting to say is as hard to reconstruct as were Socrates' own sayings.

Be that as it may, his denunciation of the overemphasis of reason, of reason as being capable of assuming the form of tyranny, vindictiveness, and so on, is important and will have its echoes on the Post-Nietzschean and Post-Marxist early Critical Theory – and I will come back to this both in the next part, and in the last chapters of this dissertation.

However, there are much more positive assessments of this agonistic frequentation of the public space. In *The Human Condition*¹³⁷, Hannah Arendt forcefully makes the case for an agonistic model of public space, which is somehow an alternative to the Habermasian model (of which more in section 2.1.3). Unlike Habermas, who takes his examples from the 18th century bourgeois public sphere and ultimately aims at rationally reconstructing a model of public sphere based on a formalized principle of communication, Arendt takes inspiration from the Greeks (arguing that modernity radically changed our worldview for the worse with the victory of *homo faber*) and makes conflict, not communication, the overarching principle.

Arendt's philosophy occupies a unique place in the context of 20th century philosophy. It left a lasting impression on Ricœur who took from Arendt a number of significant aspects which he later adapted to his own philosophy, such as the notion of narrative identity, the depiction of the capacity to promise and to forgive as well as, significantly, the emphasis put on the *initiative* of human action with its corollaries of novelty, unexpectedness and utter rejection of determinism.

Arendt's goal is to reappraise what she dubs *vita activa* (the original title of her book), that is, the life of action, political life in the strictest sense (Aristotle's *bios politikos*) over against the theoretical mode of life. Of course she recognizes the tension, latent in Ancient Greece and most of all in philosophers, between this ideal of *vita activa*, and that of *vita contemplativa*. Let us recall how in the *Protrepticus* Aristotle lauded theoretical life, described it as being more

¹³⁷ Hannah Arendt, *The Human Condition* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1958).

autonomous than any other mode of life, and thus superior to them all; in fact, theoretical life seems to be, in Aristotle, the task (*ergon*) proper to man. However, at the end of *Nichomachean Ethics*¹³⁸, he also comes to the conclusion that for men a purely theoretical life is impossible to pursue and therefore that the most noble task for us is the *political* one.

Arendt does not wish to deny this tension. However, she seems to take a detour, emphasizing the Greek's drive for public recognition through competition, in the form of a love of glory begotten out of struggle (literally, Plato's *philotimia*) and showing how, by this yielding to *philotimia*, even philosophers as writers indulged in the *love of immortality* and thus participated in the overall *agon* of Greek life. This is depicted by her as a latent struggle between the desire of contemplating all things eternal, and the drive to become immortal through our own deeds:

By their capacity for the immortal deed, by their ability to leave non-perishable traces behind, men, their individual mortality notwithstanding, attain an immortality of their own and prove themselves to be of a "divine" nature. The distinction between man and animal runs right through the human species itself: only the best (*aristoi*), who constantly prove themselves to be the best (*aristeuein*, a verb for which there is no equivalent in any other language) and who "prefer immortal fame to mortal things", are really human; (...) for it is obvious that, no matter how concerned a thinker may be with eternity, the moment he sits down to write his thoughts he ceases to be concerned primarily with eternity and shifts his attention to leaving some trace of them.¹³⁹

With this analysis, Arendt emphasises how much the Greeks were attached to the public recognition of their *arete*. Even philosophers, who seemed to be content with a merely theoretical life, as soon as they started to objectify their thoughts in writing, somehow conceded to this drive.

Certainly, for non-philosophers (or for all those who did not seek recognition through their "spiritual children" as Plato puts it in the *Symposium*¹⁴⁰)

¹³⁸ Aristotle, *Nichomachean Ethics* in *The Complete Works of Aristotle, volume 2* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1985), pp. 1729-1867. For an elucidation of the main concepts in the *Nichomachean Ethics*, see also the comments of António Caeiro to the Portuguese translation: Aristóteles, *Ética a Nicómaco*, translated by António Caeiro (Lisboa: Quetzal, 2004).

¹³⁹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, pp. 19-20.

the competition assumed different forms, like sports and public speech. By thus emphasizing the need for “public visibility” in the display of excellence, Arendt construes what has been called a “theatrical” conception of the public space, in that citizens somehow constructed a public “persona”.

Nonetheless, she displays an admiration for the way in which Greek life was organized in this respect, namely, the strict separation from the private and the public realms. The public realm was the realm of the political; the *polis* was one thing, the household was another, completely different thing. Her work has been dubbed anti-modern because when she describes “the rise of the social” in chapter two¹⁴¹ she explicitly criticizes the occlusion of the political by the social realm. And this because, even though the construction of the persona already occurred in the Greek public sphere, there was still room for genuine political action, because the polis was the domain of the (politically) equal, whereas in modern life society is seen as exerting immense pressure on individuals and therefore “imposing innumerable and various rules, all of which tend to “normalize” its members, to exclude spontaneous action or outstanding achievement.”¹⁴²

Now, again, exactly like in Nietzsche, Arendt’s critique of the modern way of life and of society as it seemed to be organized in her own day and age, implicitly contains a prospect of social philosophy and an appraisal of alternative values. Her critique is, first and foremost, a critique of “mass society”. With the dawn of mass society the social comes to embrace and control all members, “equalizing” them. However, for Arendt political and social equality are very different matters. Social equality, so the claim goes, amounts to conformism¹⁴³ whereas political equality is a formal equality which, instead, allows for really meaningful action:

To belong to the few “equals” (*homoioi*) meant to be permitted to live among one’s peers; but the public realm itself, the *polis*, was permeated by a fiercely agonal spirit, where everybody had constantly to distinguish himself from all others, to show through unique deeds or achievements that he was the best of all (*aien aristeuein*). The public realm, in

¹⁴⁰ Plato’s words are: “children that are more beautiful and more immortal (...) offspring, which, because they are immortal themselves, provide their parents with immortal glory and remembrance.” See Plato, *Symposium*, 209d, p. 492.

¹⁴¹ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 38 and ff.

¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 40.

¹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

other words, was reserved for individuality, it was the only place where men could show who they really and inexchangeably were. It was for the sake of this chance, and out of love for a body politic that made it possible to them all, that each was more or less willing to share in the burden of jurisdiction, defense and administration of public affairs.¹⁴⁴

This last passage is decisive in many ways. I have hinted at before, throughout this chapter, how conflict was deeply embedded in Greek culture, from Homer onwards, and how the strive for excellence¹⁴⁵ was deeply motivated by the desire for conquest in conflict. But the decisive claim is now apparent through Arendt's description: not only was conflict present in the cultural forms of the heroic and archaic ages, not only it occasionally resurfaced in metaphysical reifications like those of Heraclitus, not only did it show in the sporadic dialectical or rhetorical disputes; it was also an overarching element and, as far as we can attest it, a deep motivation behind everyday public life.

Bearing this in mind, Arendt's claim about public visibility and affirmation of individuality as motives behind this process strikes me as being very illuminating. This is evident in military matters, as we can see in Sparta's warrior ideal, or in Plato's bold and inventive idea of an "army of lovers".¹⁴⁶ However, as Arendt shows, it was also present in the daily tasks of upholding democracy, like in 5th and 4th centuries B.C. Athens, "out of love for a body politic".

Arendt's description needs to be unpacked. According to her, political equality was the element that made action possible. That is, because in the sphere of the *polis* citizens were allegedly free from the realm of necessity, political action was as much as possible free and unconstrained. Now, this freedom, in turn, made creative and innovative action possible. The later rise of the social and namely the rise of the economic sphere (its detachment from the household) and

¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁵ For an excellent phenomenological account of excellence (*areté*) mainly in Plato and Aristotle, see António Caeiro, *A Areté Como Possibilidade Extrema do Humano* (Lisboa: INCM, 2002).

¹⁴⁶ We find this proposal in Phaedrus' discourse in Plato's *Symposium*, 178d, p. 464: "If only there were a way to start a city or an army made up of lovers and the boys they love! Theirs would be the best possible system of society, for they would hold back from all that is shameful, and seek honor in each other's eyes. Even a few of them, in battle side by side, would conquer all the world, I'd say. For a man in love would never allow his loved one, of all people, to see him leaving ranks or dropping weapons. He'd rather die a thousand deaths!" It might be that this is actually a reference to the "Sacred Band of Thebes", which apparently was an elite core of the Theban army around the time of Plato, but it is uncertain whether it preceded or not the *Symposium*.

its subsequent invasion into the political sphere complicated matters and significantly curtailed this freedom and spontaneity of action. In Greece, as Arendt sees it, political equality was what made true action possible in the public sphere, and by being politically equal, citizens could try to assert their excellence, to prove that they were *the best*, and thus affirm their individuality through public visibility.

According to Arendt's own vocabulary, in modernity, with the rise of the social, what we have is an increasing scarcity of true "action" and instead an overabundance of rule-bound conformist "behaviour". Her own version of political and social philosophy thus amounts, at least in part, to a radical reappraisal of action as initiative, as the power to start something new and thus to distinguish oneself among equals. This is the core of her proposal: human plurality is an inescapable fact that should be acknowledged and protected as such; we are equals by right and yet irreplaceable and it is by speech and action that we reveal and make ourselves.

Word and deed are therefore what make us truly human, they are our insertion in the world and this insertion is like a "second birth".¹⁴⁷ Arendt argues forcefully that there is something radically new in human action, that it is a "new beginning". And because it is new, it is also unexpected: "This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins."¹⁴⁸ And the corollary of this argument is that "the unexpected can be expected".¹⁴⁹

This last claim is of the utmost importance. It resonates well with many of the main notions that animate Ricœur's political philosophy and approach to the history of philosophy, like *hope* and *utopia*. I will delve in more detail in these notions both in part five and in my own autonomous part eighth. The important detail to bear in mind right now is that this approach to human action and the history of philosophy strictly excludes determinism as a tenable philosophical standpoint (as well as, of course, every philosophy of history that aims at determining the course of human history).

Arendt's standpoint is reminiscent of Kant's antinomy of freedom and necessity, which we will see in more detail in the next chapter. Evidently, human beings cannot start anything *absolutely* in the universe, but the power of action is

¹⁴⁷ Arendt, *The Human Condition*, p. 176.

¹⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

the power to start something anew, albeit in relative terms, in the realm of human affairs. Thus Arendt's (and Ricœur's after hers) is a strong case for agent causation.¹⁵⁰ This belief in human action, and the emphasis in the unexpected, more than mere wishful thinking, strikes me as a strong counterweight and solution to the political situations in which there is not only a lack of foresight, but also the attempt to impose the T.I.N.A. (There is no alternative) discourse.

I will not dedicate more attention to Arendt's proposals here, for lack of space. But to sum it up I will say that her emphasis is on action and the way it is disclosed in the public realm, as is explicit in the following passage:

Because of its inherent tendency to disclose the agent together with the act, action needs for its full appearance the shining brightness we once called glory, and which is possible only in the public realm.¹⁵¹

And the paradigm of this disclosure, again, she saw in the Greeks. There are, of course, critiques that can be addressed to this depiction, and Arendt has had her fair share of polemics, including strong feminist critiques.¹⁵² Namely, and evidently, the realm of political equality among citizens in Ancient Greece entailed the significant exclusion of slaves, foreigners and women. Nonetheless, some prominent feminists (most notably of which Seyla Benhabib) did a remarkable job of recuperating Arendt's notion of the public sphere by somehow proposing a mixture between this agonistic model and the more proceduralist Habermasian model.¹⁵³

But let me now sum up what has been said about the conflict forms that can be found in the Greek source. Throughout the last sections I have been emphasizing the plurality of conflict forms we can find in Greek culture. One particular form I have been underlining is the conflict between rationality and irrationality, and I have shown how there are both irrational elements of violence, madness, and so on, in Greek culture, and also how conflict can take up a rational

¹⁵⁰ See Bernard P. Dauenhauer, "Ricœur and agent causation" in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 39, 6 (2013): 523-537.

¹⁵¹ Arendt, *Human Condition*, p. 180.

¹⁵² A survey of the reception of Arendt in feminist circles can be found in Bonnie Honig, *Feminist Interpretations of Hannah Arendt* (University Park: Penn State University Press, 1995).

¹⁵³ See Seyla Benhabib, "Feminist theory and Hannah Arendt's concept of public space" in *History of the Human Sciences* 6, 2 (1993): 97-114.

form, in philosophy or agonistic public discussion. These few pages and their synchronic diagnosis might convey the wrong impression of an oversimplistic picture. I am well aware that I cannot do justice to the whole of Greek ancient culture in this manner. In fact, beliefs in reason or in its irrational counterparts were of course mutable in ancient Greece, as they are in our own contemporary cultures. Rationalism might have had its *acme* in Ancient Greece around the fifth to fourth centuries B. C., especially in Athens; but the archaic beliefs in shamanism, Maenadism, and so on, persisted for a time, and were often contemporary to the affirmation of rationalism. Often, in the same period of time, different people have different beliefs and behaviour. As Dodds rightfully claims, “A new belief-pattern very seldom effaces completely the pattern that was there before: either the old lives on as an element in the new – sometimes an unconfessed and half-unconscious element – or else the two persist side by side, logically incompatible, but contemporaneous accepted by different individuals or even by the same individual.”¹⁵⁴ These three possibilities are in fact real: the survival of the “old” can assume an inner or an outer form. If assumed, the persistence of the old can lead to an overt cultural conflict with the “new” that tries to impose itself: Kuhn’s study of paradigm shifts in science shows this in a forceful manner¹⁵⁵; but the inner forms of persistence, either conscious or unconscious, can in fact lead to inner conflict, a conflict of beliefs, if the believer is convinced that he has different but equally valid reasons to believe both in the new and the old paradigm.

As such, I acknowledge the complexity of the mix between rationalism and irrationality in Ancient Greece, and both the certain historical shifts that the beliefs in these elements underwent, and their probable inner and/or outer juxtaposition in certain periods. What I do think this depiction attests is that the complexity only underlines the conflictual character of Greek culture whose lead I have been following in these sections.

We have thus seen conflict in the Greek cosmogony, epic poetry and theology, conflict as an overarching metaphysical paradigm in Heraclitus, conflict as the humiliation of human being in tragedy, inner conflict in Plato’s depiction of

¹⁵⁴ Dodds, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

¹⁵⁵ Thomas Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, second edition 1970).

the human soul, and political and social conflict in civic life, mainly through the reconstruction of Arendt. As I stated, conflict is testimony to a particular mix of reason and unreason in the Greek world, and philosophy's own role was to try to overcome the old beliefs and practices of the inherited conglomerate, but this was only partially fulfilled, and at the price of a certain violence exerted over inner and outer nature.

Nonetheless, with the Greeks, we are still, up to some extent, living in an ordered universe which pre-exists us and that we shall respect. Their stance was one of listening to Being, as Heidegger would put it. Now, the "all too human" agonistic which Colli saw already in the Greeks with the birth of dialectics is perhaps a phenomenon more characteristic of modernity itself. The utter destruction of properly metaphysical foundations and the need to found an "artificial" social contract without which we would allegedly be at each other's throats, could only be a modern phenomenon. As such, and up to some extent, modernity deepens the dramatic touch of *agon* in human existence and philosophy.

1.1.6 – Modern political theory: Hobbes's *Bellum omnium contra omnes*

This thesis does not aim to be an extensive historical reconstruction of conflict in philosophy, only of some of its most significant loci. As such, and for lack of possibility of dedicating book-long sections to each of the authors I would want to make justice to, I will skip the whole history of the Middle Ages, and, in terms of political theory, go straight from the Greeks to Hobbes and modern contract theory.

Modernity is an intrinsically complex and contested phenomenon, one that allows for many concurrent descriptions. One possible way of describing it takes into account the scientific revolutions put forward by Copernicus, Kepler, Galileo, Newton and so forth, the rise of scientific knowledge and, ultimately, through a dominance of technique over purely contemplative knowledge, the apparition of the model of the *homo faber* as a possible world vision. Another possible description, closely connected to this former possibility, is the political corollary of the alleged loss of foundation (whether it is an ordered *kosmos* or a metaphysical first principle): namely, the need to articulate an artificial ersatz in order to ground what up until that point had been seen as a natural result of the

pre-established world order. This will be evident in the way the moderns conceived the constitution of their institutions, and of societies themselves. In a word, the fiction of a social contract imposed against the backdrop of a no less fictional state of nature became popular from the 17th century onwards.

Hobbes, Locke, Rousseau and Kant all had their particular versions of the social contract theory, and this theory would undergo a significant reactualization in the 20th century with John Rawls, as we will see in more detail in chapter 2.2 below. My aim will not be to reconstruct their particular versions of the social contract. Actually, I am more interested in their depictions of the state of nature, and namely in the Hobbesian account of it because in his very influential rendering of the alleged state of nature (or, as he prefers to call it, “the natural condition of mankind”), Hobbes detects an inner conflictuality that really becomes an anthropological feature.

This is very important because, as it is widely stated, Hobbes’ theorizing of the Leviathan is a metaphor for the State, which is imposed by necessity, because it is the lesser of two evils. Namely, Hobbes calls upon the Leviathan so that he can avoid the existence of the dire Behemoth, with its uncontrolled violence and chaos. While the Behemoth stands for anarchical, civil-war style, gratuitous violence, the Leviathan is more akin to controlled, civilized use of force. Hobbes’ own insistence in the sovereignty of the state is thus meant to curtail the worse evil, and the influence of his own political theory in the reinforcement of the Westphalian state paradigm has been huge. In some ways, the sovereign national state as we have seen it in the last few centuries is a Hobbesian state. But let me reiterate that within the frame of Hobbes’ own political philosophy, were it not for the alleged violence of the state of nature, the solution could probably have been different.

So let us now turn to his depiction of this alleged initial state. Other political thinkers more or less contemporary with Hobbes, such as Grotius, Pufendorf and Locke also strived to describe this situation which was supposed to have preceded society itself. Nonetheless, none of these states were as turbulent as Hobbes’. And even though it is in the *Leviathan* that we find the most articulate account of it – as well as the proposed solution that allows for it to be overcome –, the most famous formulation that encapsulates what is supposed to happen in the

state of nature precedes Hobbes' *magnum opus*. In fact, it is in the preface to *De Cive* that Hobbes writes

I demonstrate in the first place, that the state of men without civil society (which state we may properly call the state of nature) is nothing else but a mere war of all against all;¹⁵⁶

Now, this “war of all against all” (or *Bellum Omnium contra Omnes*, the title of this section) epitomizes in a perfect manner the whole account to be found in the *Leviathan*. In this work, Hobbes clarifies that “in the nature of man, we find three principal causes of quarrel. First, competition; secondly, diffidence; thirdly, glory.”¹⁵⁷

These are, according to Hobbes, the three main drives. The third, glory, is reminiscent of Plato's *philotimia*. The first, competition, could be read as some sort of overall agonistic feature, but Hobbes clarifies that it is none other than strive for “gain”. However, it will be the second cause – diffidence – that will prove decisive in the transition to an organized state through the social contract. Through competition, men resort to violence, as Hobbes elucidates in a rather prosaic manner “to make themselves masters of other men's persons, wives, children, and cattle”.¹⁵⁸ The consequence, according to the formulation of the *Leviathan*, is that “it is manifest, that during the time men live without a common power to keep them all in awe, they are in that condition which is called war; and such a war, as is of every man, against every man.”¹⁵⁹

Ultimately, it will be for the sake of diffidence, i.e., self-preservation or “continual fear, and danger of violent death”¹⁶⁰ that individuals will engage in the social pact, whereby “*I will authorize and give up my right of governing myself*”¹⁶¹ as will all the others; the result will be a sovereign power made up of “mutual covenants” for the sake of peace and common defense.¹⁶²

Thus without a state, or, in Hobbes' own terminology, a Commonwealth, there is a situation of perpetual tension, one in which no industry can take place.

¹⁵⁶ Thomas Hobbes, *De Cive*, quoted by J. C. A. Gaskin in his introduction to Hobbes, *Leviathan* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996), p. xviii.

¹⁵⁷ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, §6, p. 83.

¹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, §7, p. 83.

¹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, §8, p. 84.

¹⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, §9, p. 84.

¹⁶¹ *Ibid.*, §13, p. 114.

¹⁶² *Ibid.*

As Glen Newey points out, “Hobbes uses “war” in an extended sense, to include not just armed hostilities but any situation where there is no reasonable expectation that hostilities will not erupt.”¹⁶³ Therefore, any non-organized situation is, if not actual mayhem, at least potential strife. From this follows the diagnosis of man’s natural unsociability and the need to curb it through artificial means: “Human beings had to be educated to live in society. From this it followed that they were not born fit for society, and thus were not naturally sociable.”¹⁶⁴ With this diagnosis, we could not be further from Aristotle’s own depiction of the human being’s organization in society. Ultimately, Hobbes seems to consider that even notions of what is just or unjust are not natural but acquired: “Where there is no common power, there is no law: where no law, no injustice. Force, and fraud, are in war the two cardinal virtues.”¹⁶⁵ In a word, in Hobbes, we are further from natural right than in anyone of his contemporaries.

As I stated before, Hobbes’ depiction of the natural condition of mankind was very influential in the modern period, and it still is today. In his own controversial manner, Carl Schmitt recovers the Hobbesian state theory, and goes even further than Hobbes, criticizing his liberalism¹⁶⁶; and Leo Strauss goes so far as to consider Hobbes as the founder of modern political philosophy.¹⁶⁷ Now, this is a somewhat disputable claim, but it might be argued that with his picture of the natural condition of human kind as one of potential all-out mayhem, withdrawal from natural right and insistence on the need for an artificial covenant, Hobbes really is the founder of something new. He is perhaps a significant step towards what some have called post-traditional societies.¹⁶⁸ Furthermore, with his political philosophy, the imputation of conflictuality that bears upon our shoulders is taken to a whole new level. No longer do we find an attestation of *agon* as a potentially

¹⁶³ Glen Newey, *Routledge Philosophy Guidebook to Hobbes and Leviathan* (London: Routledge, 2008), p. 51.

¹⁶⁴ Helen Thornton, *State of Nature or Eden? Thomas Hobbes and His Contemporaries on the Natural Condition of Human Beings* (Rochester: University of Rochester Press, 2005) p. 54.

¹⁶⁵ Hobbes, *Leviathan*, §13, p. 85. Kinch Hoekstra takes this latter affirmation to be one Hobbes’ most Machiavellian phrases. See Kinch Hoekstra, “Hobbes on the Natural Condition of Mankind” in *The Cambridge Companion to Hobbes’s Leviathan*, edited by Patricia Springborg (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007) p. 111.

¹⁶⁶ Carl Schmitt, *The Leviathan in the State Theory of Thomas Hobbes. Meaning and Failure of a Political Symbol*, translated by George Schwab and Erna Hilfstein (Westport: Greenwood Press, 1996).

¹⁶⁷ See for instance Leo Strauss, *The Political Philosophy of Hobbes. Its Basis and its Genesis*, translated by Elsa M. Sinclair (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1963) p. viii of the preface.

¹⁶⁸ See, for instance, Anthony Giddens, *Modernity and Self Identity. Self and Society in the Late Modern Age* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991).

fertile, creative and positive trait, as it could be found in the Greeks. For Hobbes, conflict is (real or potential) violence, and so interpersonal conflict must be avoided by a “common power” that “keeps us in awe”.

The possible authoritarian consequences of this political philosophy are obvious, and if Hobbes is the founder of modern political philosophy, I am glad to have seen Kant, Hegel and Marx reform it. And in fact, the influence of the Hobbesian portrait of the state of nature notwithstanding, there were many who strongly opposed it. Firstly, as Helen Thornton has pointed out, “for many of Hobbes’ contemporaries, the state of nature was understood to be a description of the pre-historic origin of society, and in this way it was also related to the Edenic condition”¹⁶⁹, so his readers were left to reconcile his own vision of the natural condition with the Biblical account of it, even if they felt compelled to agree with him. Secondly, a different, and perhaps almost as influential depiction of the state of nature was to appear in the following century, namely Rousseau’s.

Now, Rousseau’s own portrait of the state of nature, which I mention here only in passing, is essentially almost antithetical to the Hobbesian standpoint, and in this discussion the origin, effects and significance of civilization are decided. So these are no small stakes. In his *Discourse on Inequality*, Rousseau explicitly defends:

Above all, let us not conclude, with Hobbes, that because man has no idea of goodness, he must be naturally wicked; that he is vicious because he does not know virtue (...) In reasoning on the principles he lays down, he ought to have said that the state of nature, being that in which the care for our own preservation is the least prejudicial to that of others, was consequently the best calculated to promote peace, and the most suitable for mankind. He does say the exact opposite, in consequence of having improperly admitted, as a part of savage man's care for self-preservation, the gratification of a multitude of passions which are the work of society, and have made laws necessary.¹⁷⁰

Indeed, in Rousseau’s state of nature, the main feelings associated with human beings are not fear and competition, but rather “love of self” (*amour propre*) and pity. Therefore, as it is evident in the passage quoted above, this self-preservation

¹⁶⁹ Thornton, *op. cit.*, p. 1.

¹⁷⁰ Rousseau, *A Discourse on the Origin of Inequality*, translated by G. D. H. Cole (New York: Digibooks, 2006), p. 32.

is especially attuned to peace. Not only is self-love not necessarily a pathological, negative phenomenon – as Frederick Neuhouser has skillfully shown¹⁷¹ – but even if it were, in Rousseau’s state of nature this drive is corrected by pity or compassion. In this assessment, Rousseau comes close to the Scottish Enlightenment and namely to Adam Smith’s early insistence on sympathy.¹⁷²

The corollary of this diagnosis is, for Rousseau, that the main ills in intersubjective relationships – most notably of which inequality – are specifically social ills that come as a result of the creation of society and its institutions. According to this depiction, it is civilization itself, and not the state of nature, that is responsible for our vices, and so it is civilization that must be kept under control through education. As such, the social philosophies that can be derived from Hobbes and Rousseau are almost antithetical.

But there were other responses to Hobbes too. As Ricœur has contended, Hegel’s own early depiction of the phenomena of recognition during the Jena period can be seen as an indirect response to Hobbes¹⁷³, one that does not deny the existence of intersubjective conflict, but which radically displaces its motivation from naturalistic to moral sources. In a word, with Hegel’s depiction of recognition, conflict will become struggle, struggle for recognition. Ultimately, the portrayal of intersubjective relations as a particular mix of sociability and unsociability traversed the whole modern era in political philosophy, as different philosophers tried to sort out our own way out of – or at least through – conflict.

In the next few chapters I want to go beyond Hobbes and Rousseau and to try to grasp, at least in a partial manner, the complexity of the mutations of conflict in the works of Kant, Hegel and Marx. However, it goes without saying that Kant transformed the whole of philosophy. As such, even though I will eventually end this part by coming back to social conflict, and at that point in the works of Marx, I will first have to make a detour through the ontological significance of conflict as such – mainly through the figures of negation and dialectics – in these authors, because in the context of German idealism this topic

¹⁷¹ See Frederick Neuhouser, *Rousseau’s Theodicy of Self-Love. Evil, Rationality and the Drive for Recognition* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

¹⁷² See Adam Smith, *The Theory of Moral Sentiments* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2004), Part I, chapter I “Of sympathy” and II “Of the pleasure of mutual sympathy”, pp. 11-20.

¹⁷³ See the section “Hobbes’s challenge” in Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. 161 ff.

acquired an immense complexity. With that detour, we will also grasp other meaningful models of conflict which were decisive for Ricœur.

1.2 – Kant on Critique, Negation and the Antinomies: Conflict as Reciprocal Limitation

Since we have to sort out the debate between Kant and Hegel that is taking place within Ricœur's philosophy, it makes sense to make Kant our starting point, and namely the Kant of the first critique. And this not only because Kant comes chronologically before Hegel, but also because even if Ricœur tries to adopt a somewhat Hegelian inspiration, the philosophical grounds to reject Absolute Knowing and the overwhelming power of reason are to be found primarily in Kant, even if Ricœur will find confirmation of this standpoint also in existentialism and phenomenology, as will be apparent in part three of this thesis. This link between hermeneutics and Kantianism is explicitly assumed by Ricœur: "I would say today that all hermeneutics are Kantian to the degree that the powerlessness of self-knowledge is the negative counterpart of the necessity to decipher signs given in me and outside me. It is the limited character of self-knowledge which imposes the indirect strategy of interpretation."¹⁷⁴

I mentioned before that conflict has close ties with the notion of negation. This assertion is self-evident, almost tautological, because if there was not something as an inner contradiction in reality, in life, in thought, the positive existence of conflict would not even be conceptually possible. Thus it is the role of negation, or negativity, in philosophy, that will help determine the outcome of the several conflicts that appear along the way, and also how far can they go. That Ricœur understood this we can be certain, because we now know that he entertained for long the project of developing a philosophy of negation in its many instantiations, from the Pre-Socratics to Sartre.¹⁷⁵ An instrumental part of this

¹⁷⁴ Ricœur, Foreword to Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology: The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. xvi. For a Kantian reading of Ricœur, connecting the Kantian standpoint with an enquiry on the relations between Ricœur's philosophy, his hermeneutical stance, and literature, see Fernanda Henriques, *Filosofia e Literatura. Um Percorso Hermenêutico em Paul Ricœur* (Porto: Afrontamento, 2005). As I stated before, her insistence on the topic of conflict in Ricœur's philosophy was one of the inspirations leading up to the work I am putting forward in this thesis.

¹⁷⁵ For a reconstruction of this philosophy of negation through a comprehensive reading of the scattered occurrences of Ricœur's analyses of negation throughout his writings (many of them unpublished) see Alison Scott-Baumann's latest book: Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Negation of Happiness* (London: Bloomsbury, 2013).

meticulous study he undertook on negation are five lectures, probably from the 60s, that delve precisely on Kant's use of negation.¹⁷⁶

Right at the outset of these lectures, Ricœur lets us know, in a comment added on the margin of the manuscript, that the refusal to accept Absolute Knowing sends us back from Hegel's dialectic to Kant's "Philosophy of Limits". He thus proposes that we read Kant from the vantage point of some texts on negation, namely the Pre-Critical 1763 essay *Attempt to Introduce the Concept of Negative Magnitudes into Philosophy*¹⁷⁷ and the chapters of the *Critique of Pure Reason* that mention negation or can be considered as expressions of negation. This means that when dealing with the topic of negation in the first critique, Ricœur will not only analyze what is most obvious, that is, the place of negation as a category of quality, alongside those of reality and limitation. Rather, he will try to grasp the multiple roles that negation plays in the first critique: the determination and limitation of reality, the ideality of time and space in the "transcendental aesthetic", the noumenon as that which is not a phenomenon, and also, in what constitutes a more complex approach, a semantic analysis of the linguistic negative formulations used in Kant's discourse that ties their polemical and refutational intentions with a deeply ontological grounding: the role of negation in determining the boundaries of phenomenality itself and in keeping reason from going beyond all possible experience.

I will come back to these lectures. However, since this chapter is dedicated to Kant, and because of Kant's Copernican revolution and its consequences, which abruptly changed the fate of all subsequent philosophy and turned it sharply in a critical direction, I will start by recalling the heart of his outstanding contribution to philosophy: the critical project. After having recapped the main traits of the critical project, such as it appears in the *Critique of Pure*

¹⁷⁶ These are handwritten, unpublished lectures, called "Kant et la négation" which are stored and given restricted access in the Fonds Ricœur. The full reference is Archives Ricœur, Fonds Ricœur, Bibliothèque de l'Institut Protestant de Théologie (Paris), inventaire 1, dossier 96, La négation, Cours (c. 1952-68) feuillets 8450-840. The only person to have dealt in depth with these writings on negation is Alison Scott-Baumann, and I thank her for having allowed me to work with her in the Kant lectures, which provide valuable insights into the impact of Kantian philosophy in Ricœur, through his assessment of the specific way in which negation operated within the framework of Kantian philosophy.

¹⁷⁷ Kant, "Attempt to introduce the concept of negative magnitudes into philosophy" (1763) in *Theoretical Philosophy 1755-1770* translated and edited by David Walford in collaboration with Ralf Meerbote (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2002), pp. 203-241. From now on, I shall refer to this essay as *Negative Magnitudes*.

Reason, I will proceed to show how the topic of negation came to the fore in Kantian philosophy, how Ricœur read it and appropriated it and, finally, I will outline the main traits of the Antinomies of pure reason, which exemplify a first type of conflict, one that has illusion as its source and that can, to that extent, be utterly dissolved by destroying its originary illusion. I hope to show, in this way, how it is Kantian philosophy that provides the overall boundaries of Ricœur's project, how he appropriates philosophical critique and also in which way the model of conflict that we find in the Antinomies will later be used by Ricœur, even if this is not explicitly acknowledged as such. Towards the end of the chapter, I will go beyond this general characterization of conflict and negation in Kantian philosophy, and briefly allude to some specific points in which conflict resurfaces in his moral and political philosophy.

1.2.1 – Kant's critical project

Kant undertakes a critique and delimitation of reason in its three uses. This critique will, on the one hand, determine what we can legitimately claim to know and, on the other, what we ought to do. These are the two aspects I will be focusing on, leaving aside the critique of judgment.

Right from the start of the first critique, Kant presents the paradoxical position in which human reason is, and that is to be dissolved by the critical procedure: it is "burdened by questions it cannot dismiss, but which it also cannot answer"¹⁷⁸. And since these questions "never cease", it falls into "obscurity" and "contradictions".¹⁷⁹ The striking conclusion of the second paragraph of the first edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is that "The battlefield of these endless controversies is called metaphysics".¹⁸⁰ Therefore, right at the outset, Kant prepares the ground for a depiction of all pre-critical philosophy in terms of *conflicts*, these same fundamental conflicts that will fill the painstakingly long and complex section on the dialectic of pure reason. His proposal is ambitious, in that this critique, understood as a treatise on the method of transcendental philosophy,

¹⁷⁸ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Avii, p. 99.

¹⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, Aviii, p. 99.

¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

is supposed to “catalog the entire outline of the science of metaphysics”¹⁸¹ both by determining its boundaries, and internal structure.

The famous passage in the preface to the second edition shows us Kant depicting this critique as having both a negative and a positive utility.¹⁸² It is negative insofar as, by showing how synthetic a priori judgments are illegitimate in philosophy, it prevents us from venturing with speculative reason beyond the boundaries of experience – and therefore it *narrows* the domain of our theoretical knowledge; but precisely by doing this, it removes, according to Kant, an *obstacle*. Theoretical reason will be prohibited to extend beyond sensibility, beyond phenomena, and forbidden to try to know noumena, but in so proceeding we will have, in fact, allowed practical reason to venture in these domains. This claim will eventually attain its proper ground in the second critique, where what was object of antinomical treatment in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, eventually attains the status of several practical postulates. I do not wish to comment on God, the beginning of the universe or the immortality of the soul; but at least this elaborate solution will have had the merit of firmly grounding human freedom.

Critical philosophy, understood as the critique of transcendental philosophy, will thus provide an alternative both to dogmatism and skepticism. According to Kant, in the last few lines of this first critique, after all said and done, “only the critical path is still open”.¹⁸³ I will not delve into the details of how Kant tries to transform metaphysics as a natural disposition – present in each and every one of us (*metaphysica naturalis*), constantly putting problematical questions that lead us to transcend experience – into a philosophical science that puts reason in check and controls the strive for the unconditioned, because doing so would go beyond the boundaries of this succinct exposition. Suffice it to say that in my opinion, Kant’s outstanding contribution to theoretical philosophy resides precisely in this: showing how an *immanent critique*, that is, a critique that finds and reveals the boundaries of a given universe can have both a positive and a negative utility. The negative utility, in Kant’s case, is to show how the transcendent aim, when pointed beyond experience, is useless; the positive utility, besides the whipping into shape of human reason, is to find new domains in which

¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, Bxxiii, p. 113.

¹⁸² *Ibid.*, Bxxiv, p. 114.

¹⁸³ *Ibid.*, A855/B883, p. 704.

this purged faculty, now rid of its illusions of grandeur, can be applied, without its transformative and operational capacity being lost. This will be evident in Kant's depiction of regulative ideas, when applied to the practical domains of the ethical or the social.

In 1954, in an article simply called "Kant et Husserl"¹⁸⁴ Ricœur discerns another use for the Kantian critical operation, besides the ones I just mentioned. Analyzing the abovementioned preface to the second edition¹⁸⁵ he sees the first *Critique* as bearing in itself the seeds of an implicit phenomenology¹⁸⁶, because the "internal structure" which the *Critique* wants to fully determine obviously contains the entire depiction and description of the phenomena of the world, insofar as they can be legitimately known by us. To the extent that the critical operation also determines, as we have seen, the limits of knowledge, it acts as an ontological foundation of the whole phenomenological analysis. If, Ricœur argues, we assume that the *Critique* contains in itself more than a simple epistemological signification, than we can argue that its scope is the internal constitution of phenomena, a process very similar to the phenomenological reduction (in the Husserlian sense) that aims at describing the phenomena themselves.¹⁸⁷

Now, this phenomenology is evidently very different from Husserl's, because it is, first and foremost, a phenomenology of judgment¹⁸⁸; however, a close reading of the *Critique* in phenomenological terms reveals important aspects both of the noetic constitution (namely in the section on the *schematism* of pure understanding) and of the noematic analysis of the objects of the world, mainly in the sections concerning the analogies of experience. Besides, for Ricœur, it is precisely the active positing of the limits of sensibility and the forceful affirmation of the limitation of the act of knowing that will, in turn, provide Husserlian phenomenology with an ontological grounding *and* limitation of all phenomenality.¹⁸⁹ By withholding from positing the world as an absolute, I gain for myself the comprehension of it as a phenomenon (or the totality of phenomena) and also the possibility of describing it.

¹⁸⁴ Ricœur, "Kant et Husserl", reprinted in *A l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1986), pp. 273-314.

¹⁸⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, bxxiii.

¹⁸⁶ Ricœur, *Kant et Husserl*, p. 278.

¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 279-280.

¹⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 284.

¹⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 296.

Finally, Ricœur finds in Kant's practical philosophy not only the systematic counterpart and complement of the theoretical philosophy of the first *Critique*, but also the only possible foundation of the other person that appears before me. Therefore, the solution to Husserl's problematic grounding of intersubjectivity is precisely the Kantian positing of something purely practical *in itself*, the in itself of the person that I must respect when obeying the categorical imperative. Respect, as a rational feeling, appears thus in Kant's practical philosophy as the only guarantee of the absolute existence of the other that I perceive, the only real limitation for my action; the "kingdom of ends" is the real grounding of intersubjectivity and the only guarantee that the other that I perceive is someone towards whom I must behave ethically: "The glory of phenomenology is of having elevated, through 'reduction', the investigation of appearing to the glory of science. But the glory of Kantianism is of having being capable of coordinating the research of appearing with the limit function of the in itself and with the practical determination of the in itself as freedom and as the whole of persons. Husserl *does* phenomenology. But Kant *limits it* and *grounds it*."¹⁹⁰

So there are several functions of critique for Kant. But allow me first to emphasize its negative function, in order to better grasp how this negative function frees up the possibility of a positive, creative function. Nonetheless, so that we can see from where negation springs in Kant's philosophy, let us take a step back to pre-Critical philosophy.

1.2.2 – Kant on negation

It is interesting to note that negation is, for the early Kant, first and foremost a mathematical concept that he wants to import and apply to philosophy. In *Negative Magnitudes* (1763) the whole operative concept of negation that he wants to put forward and use in philosophy is that of negative magnitude, which is an intensive magnitude that stems from what he calls *real opposition* or *nihil privativum*. The whole point is to show that there are some types of oppositions or

¹⁹⁰ [My translation] "La gloire de la phénoménologie est d'avoir élevé à la dignité de science, par la 'réduction', l'investigation de l'apparaître. Mais la gloire du Kantisme est d'avoir su coordonner l'investigation de l'apparaître à la fonction limite de l'en soi et à la détermination pratique de l'en soi comme liberté et comme tout des personnes. Husserl *fait* la phénoménologie. Mais Kant la *limite* et la *fonde*." Ricœur, "Kant et Husserl", p. 313.

clashes that are different from logical contradiction. Logical contradiction, which he dubs *nihil negativum* (or, *nothing at all*) consists in simultaneously affirming and denying the same predicate about the same thing¹⁹¹; thus the result is self-contradictory and, in this binary logic, nothing ensues.

The examples he gives of *real oppositions* are basically physical examples; if we imagine a body at rest, one who is subject to the action of two forces of the same magnitude exerting their influence on opposite directions, the result we have is the forces *annul* each other, they play each other out; but this corollary is not a logical contradiction that simply vanishes, eradicating the predicate; rather, the result is precisely a body at rest, kept in some sort of homeostatic balance by an equilibrium of opposing forces. In what concerns its movement, the result of the opposition is nothing=0.¹⁹² Another example is that of a financial debt: if person A owes person B a certain amount of money but, in turn, person C owes person A the exact same amount of money, we can argue that the debts cancel each other out and therefore A has 0 debt.

Ultimately, negative magnitudes are not negations of magnitudes, but rather positive magnitudes affected by a negative sign (more or less like in mathematics). However, what Kant has in mind is that negative magnitudes, *qua* intensive magnitudes, are basically uncountable magnitudes¹⁹³; this is the reason why negation will belong to the category of quality, not quantity, in Kant's mature philosophy. Ricœur comments that one of the important aspects of the 1763 essay is that it shows us that there is a type of logic which is different from formal logic: this is a logic of the real.¹⁹⁴ We could further argue that this "logic of the real", both different and more fundamental than formal logic, is already a step towards Kant's transcendental logic, namely in the combination between reality and negation that produces limitation and the detachment of the phenomenal world from the noumenal. Evidently, Hegel would further develop this "logic of the

¹⁹¹ Kant, *Negative Magnitudes*, p. 211.

¹⁹² *Ibid.*

¹⁹³ On this point, see Marco Giovanelli's comment. Intensive magnitudes are magnitudes of level that "allow differences in the distribution of a quality (e. g., heat) to be measured relative to situations in which the quality is uniformly distributed", whereas in extensive magnitudes "one can measure by juxtaposing a standard unit of measure in order to determine how many units the given magnitude contains." Marco Giovanelli, *Reality and Negation – Kant's Principle of Anticipations of Perception. An Investigation of its impact on the Post-Kantian Debate* (Heidelberg: Springer, 2011) p. 10.

¹⁹⁴ Ricœur, "Kant et la négation", p. 8452.

real”, with entirely unforeseen ambition and consequences, in his *Science of Logic*.¹⁹⁵

Kant tries to provide examples of these positive magnitudes affected with a negative sign; some of them are vaguely psychological (hate is a negative love), others properly moral (vice is a negative virtue)¹⁹⁶, but he is at a loss when trying to deliver properly philosophical examples of the utility of this type of negation. Ultimately, he ends up describing all natural changes in the world as cancelling each other out: the natural world as a zero-sum game.¹⁹⁷ His ultimate definition of real opposition is “*because something is, something else is cancelled*”.¹⁹⁸

So what we have here is the depiction of a specific type of conflict. It is a conflict between real forces (and let us take this to be either physical forces or any other kind of forces, as we can say, for instance and in a metaphorical manner, that there are tensions in a certain philosophical system or political environment) but one whose result is always a zero-sum game. In this conflict no one wins, as there seems to be a perfect symmetry of forces. The conflicting forces cohabit and reciprocally limit each other. No man is the better man. Furthermore, the actual dynamic of forces, the fact that there are opposing forces, only contributes to the immobility of the system. Let us say that if this was Being we were talking about, it could well be in inner tension and perpetual Heraclitean change: at the surface it would be as calm as Parmenides’s spherical Being: “one, eternal and immutable”. We are very far from the Hegelian master and slave dialectic, where we go from an initial state of struggle and inevitable supremacy of one over the other – indeed, can two forces really be exactly reciprocal in the human order of things, without one of them eventually faltering? – to a reciprocity that is actually *positive*, in that it stems from mutual recognition.

This dyadic depiction of negation is not really kept in the *Critique of Pure Reason*. As Paul Guyer and Marco Giovanelli have shown¹⁹⁹, there is an intrinsic connection between the notion of real opposition and the principle of the

¹⁹⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, translated and edited by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

¹⁹⁶ Kant, *Negative Magnitudes*, p. 221.

¹⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

¹⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁹⁹ See Paul Guyer’s introduction to the *Critique of Pure Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 11. See also Giovanelli, *Reality and Negation*, *op. cit.*, p. 41.

anticipations of perception that appears in the *Critique of Pure Reason*.²⁰⁰ Perception is different from sensation in that perceptions seem to attest to the presence of an objective element, namely, *Reality*.²⁰¹ It is important to remember that reality is here *Realität*, not *Wirklichkeit*, which is a modal category, and can be better translated by *Existence*. These two terms, in Kant like in Hegel, have two different meanings. Suffice it to say that here, *reality*, has to do with the determination of the thing, *what that thing is*²⁰², not with the positing of its existence.

Now in every perception such as in every sensation, Kant argues, there is a mix of reality and negation (“a transition from reality to negation, that makes every reality representable”²⁰³), of what the object is and what it is not; phenomena can admit different degrees between reality and negation, i.e., their magnitude can vary. At the end of Transcendental Analytic, right before we enter the vast kingdom of illusion that is the Transcendental Dialectic, Kant presents a table that shows the four different meanings that the category of negation assumes in the Analytic. These are, respectively: 1) the concept of *none*, that is, a concept without an object, e.g., the noumena (*ens rationis*); 2) the absence of an object, such as its shadow (*nihil privativum*); 3) the mere form of intuition, that is, space and time as the conditions of possibility of all phenomena, such as they have been presented in the transcendental aesthetic; 4) the object of a concept that contradicts itself (*nihil negativum*). We can see how two other forms of negation are added to the ones that were listed in 1763.

All these forms of widespread negation could lead to the impression that it is everywhere, but that it is not as important as in 1763, when all the world was described in terms of negation. However, we must stress the fact that while, in the transition from 1763 to 1781, negation seems to be diluted among many other categories, in fact, it is reasserted as probably the key-category, alongside reality. Indeed, when asserting the steadfast distinction between phenomena and noumena, the negative utility of the critique is at its height: we simply learn what we can, and what we cannot legitimately expect to know. Therefore, our faculty of knowing is *limited*, and this limitation, which is tied with the impossibility of

²⁰⁰ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A166-A176/B207-B218.

²⁰¹ See Giovannelli, *Reality and Negation*, p. 10.

²⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁰³ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* B183, p. 275.

synthetic a priori knowledge in philosophy, is simultaneously a limit of my perception, of my possible experience, and of all philosophy that wants to avoid the pitfalls of both dogmatism and skepticism. Thus it is not only a *limited philosophy* but, as Ricœur will often insist, a “philosophy of limits”.

We have seen how Kant’s 1763 dynamical notion of real opposition resulted in a reciprocal limitation, or a conflict whose forces annulled each other, while still remaining active. Now it remains to be shown how the mobilizing category of negation actually totalizes itself in the opposition of reason to itself, in its effort to think the unconditioned, and to provide answers to the questions it cannot help but formulate, because they appear to it not only as theoretical, but also as practical problems. This is precisely what Kant calls the Transcendental Dialectic.

1.2.3 – Transcendental dialectic and the conflict of reason with itself in the antinomies

It goes without saying that the Kantian sense of “dialectic” is radically different from the positive meanings attributed to dialectic in the philosophical tradition, from Heraclitus and Plato to Hegel and Marx. While all these kinds of dialectics are radically different from one another, they all share a positive appreciation of dialectic as a moving force; now, for Kant, dialectic is fundamentally “error”, or even “illusion” and “sophistry”. As such, it must be reigned in, and dissolved by the critical philosopher. What Kant strives to do in the “Transcendental Dialectic” section of the *Critique of Pure Reason* is a “critique of dialectical illusion”. In so doing, Kant roughly adopts an Aristotelian definition of dialectic – Aristotle opposed demonstrative reasoning to dialectical reasoning, the latter stemming from commonly held opinions, proper to rhetoric more than to science²⁰⁴ – as simple opinion.

Now the problem is, Kant claims, that the “subjective grounds of judgment” are taken to be “objective grounds”, or as he puts it, that sensibility

²⁰⁴ This link between Aristotle and Kant’s definition of dialectics, and the way Kant explores one of the meanings attributed to this term by Aristotle, is often emphasized in Kantian scholarship. See for instance the entry “Dialectic” in Howard Caygill, *A Kant Dictionary* (Oxford: Blackwell, 2000), p. 157. See also Aristotle, *Topics*, *op. cit.*, 100a, p. 167: “dialectical deduction (...) reasons from reputable opinions”

exerts an “unnoticed influence” on understanding.²⁰⁵ The result of this undue influence is that instead of restricting ourselves to reason within the limits of all possible experience, we are impelled to transcend them, in our search for unity. Thus our reason formulates transcendent principles rather than sticking to merely immanent principles that stem from understanding itself. The result is that, in our search for the unconditioned, we think we find it in appearances, and thus grant them the status of things in themselves. And this is, for Kant, totally unacceptable, because it is an illegitimate use of our faculties. It rests on a confusion between noumenon and phenomenon. Ricœur notes that the noumenal object is an invitation to transform into a determinate object what must remain undetermined.²⁰⁶

Curiously enough, Kant says that the dialectic of pure reason is “natural and unavoidable” and that “even after we have exposed the mirage it will still not cease to lead our reason on with false hopes, continually propelling it into momentary aberrations that always need to be removed.”²⁰⁷ Allow me to note in passing that this description reveals an important aspect of Kantianism: its rigid discipline. It is almost, we could say, an asceticism. This has often been commented about his practical philosophy, with its emphasis on duty, respect for the law, and so on. Nevertheless, even in theoretical philosophy this aspect is present: never do we cease to be, let us say, tempted by illusion, and never must we fall prey to it. Now, the quest for unity through dialectical reason has of course been a characteristic of Hegelian philosophy. When Ricœur comes back to assess his post-Hegelian Kantianism in the late 80s, as we will see in the next chapter, he seems to refer to Hegelianism as a temptation that must be resisted and he mentions Hegel as someone who needs to be “mourned”. And why? Precisely in virtue of Ricœur’s allegiance to the Kantian framework. Earlier, in “Kant et la négation” he emphasized that it is precisely because of the temptation that negation is permanent, rather than circumstantial.²⁰⁸

Now, the Transcendental Dialectic is comprised of three different parts. These are, respectively, the paralogisms, the antinomies and the ideal of pure reason. This is, again, a division inspired by Aristotle. Each of these three parts is

²⁰⁵ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A294/B350, p. 385.

²⁰⁶ Ricœur, “Kant et la négation”, p. 8471.

²⁰⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A298/B354, pp. 386-387.

²⁰⁸ Ricœur, “Kant et la négation”, p. 8472.

an application of an idea of reason, defined as “a concept made up of notions, which goes beyond the possibility of experience”²⁰⁹ These will, in turn, analyze the objects of the three traditional metaphysical disciplines – the three parts of “special metaphysics”, that is, the scholarly elaboration of metaphysics, as against metaphysics as a natural disposition – as they were defined by Christian Wolff; namely, rational psychology, rational cosmology and rational theology and whose objects are the self, the world and God. Whether or not we are free, our soul is immortal and God exists will be the main questions troubling the transcendental dialectic. Again, Ricœur is clear that we cannot elaborate a philosophy of limits without a triple analysis of paralogism, antinomy and ideal.²¹⁰ He also emphasizes that it is noteworthy that each of these modes of illusion adheres to a specific object, which shows us that they pertain to a transcendental type of logic (and not to logic as such): they do not display a lack of coherence but rather produce false objects.²¹¹

Kant takes up from Aristotle the definition of a paralogism as an incorrect syllogism. However, more than logical paralogism, defined as a false syllogism due to its form, Kant will explore the transcendental paralogism, taken to be “a transcendental ground for inferring falsely due to its form”. Now, it is not clear what this transcendental ground is but, as Guyer explains, paralogisms look like valid arguments but are not, because the major and the minor premises use the same term in two different senses.²¹² Perhaps the transcendental ground Kant is alluding to is only our tendency to fall back into the suprasensible because of our inclination towards the unconditioned.

Through his critique of the four paralogisms presented (which affirm that the soul is substance, simple, a person and that outer appearances are of doubtful existence) Kant is refuting “rational psychologists” such as Descartes, Leibniz and Wolff. I will not follow the thread of Kant’s refutation of the four paralogisms; suffice it to say that the main objection, as Guyer points out, resides on an

²⁰⁹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A320/B377, p. 399.

²¹⁰ Ricœur, “Kant et la négation”, p. 8473.

²¹¹ *Ibid.*

²¹² See Paul Guyer, *Kant* (London: Routledge, 2006) p. 134: “His diagnosis of the paralogisms about the soul suggests that what he actually means is that the paralogisms look like valid arguments but are not, because the major and minor premises use the same term in two different senses (B 411–12), but that this is not mere carelessness – there is a “transcendental ground” that compels us all to make this mistake as long as we are not enlightened by the critical philosophy. But the source of this “transcendental ground” is not entirely clear in Kant’s account.”

equivocation about the representation of the self. The self is, evidently, a subjective condition for thinking; but the error resides in extrapolating that subjective condition, the “I think” that accompanies all my representations and making it an affirmation of the self as an independent substance, different from all other objects in the world.²¹³ Nevertheless, in here, Kant’s refutation is pretty straightforward: that is, the theses of the paralogisms are not given enough strength and emphasis to be taken seriously. The contrary happens in the following section of the *Critique of Pure Reason*, where both theses and antitheses are given their due emphasis.

The “Antinomies of pure reason” deal with our representation of the world and our beliefs about it. Nowhere else than in this section is Kant’s attempt to provide a solution for the quarrel between dogmatism and skepticism more evident, or the constitutive conflicts inhabiting human reason rendered more explicit. As Victoria S. Wike contends “the antinomy of pure reason plays a central role in leading both Kant and future readers to a critique of reason”²¹⁴, and as she also points out, Kant did not fail to recognize its centrality, going to the point of having claimed that it was the antinomy itself – so, in this case, not David Hume... – that awoke him from his dogmatic slumber so that the critique of reason could “resolve the scandal of ostensible contradiction of reason with itself.”²¹⁵ Ricœur draws a link between this ostensible contradiction and the notion of real opposition from *Negative Magnitudes*; according to him, the concept of real opposition transforms and expands itself with the antinomies. They are the complete internalization of universal opposition.²¹⁶

Right at the outset of the section, Kant states that the antinomies deal with the “objective synthesis of appearances”²¹⁷ and that the fact that there are two equally plausible possibilities configures a “wholly natural antithetic”.²¹⁸ As Guyer explains, the antinomies arise when we apply the idea of the unconditioned

²¹³ See Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, A396, p. 439 and Guyer, *Kant*, p. 137.

²¹⁴ See Victoria S. Wike, *Kant’s Antinomies of Reason. Their Origin and their Resolution* (Washington: University Press of America, 1982), p. viii.

²¹⁵ These are Kant’s own words, quoted from a letter to Christian Garve and written in 1798. Quoted by Wike, *ibid*.

²¹⁶ Ricœur, “Kant et la négation”, p. 8474.

²¹⁷ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason* A406-407/B433, p. 459.

²¹⁸ *Ibid.*, A407/B433, p. 460.

to the intuition of the world.²¹⁹ However, as we have seen, we cannot find the unconditioned in experience. Kant will present four antinomies, that is, four theses and four antitheses concerning the world, which all seem plausible. Nevertheless, this group is divided into two different cases. In one case, the unconditioned sought after could hypothetically only be found in sensible experience (but it actually cannot), in which case both thesis and antithesis are shown to be false. In the other case, the unconditioned is conceived as something beyond experience but on this occasion it is an object of belief rather than knowledge, and so, as belief, thesis and antithesis are both true.²²⁰ This is the kernel of Kant's solution of the quarrel between skepticism and dogmatism and so both a concrete application for critical philosophy and a setting of the limits within which our knowledge operates. This is also a strict separation of knowledge and belief, as is evident in the resolution of the third and fourth antinomies. As Kant famously stated in the preface to the second edition of the *Critique of Pure Reason*: "I had to deny knowledge in order to make room for faith".²²¹ But let me briefly mention each one of the antinomies before summing up the importance of the whole section.

The first antinomy concerns the beginning of the world in time and its boundaries in space. Is it finite or infinite as regards time and space? The second antinomy is the antinomy of substance. Does the world consist of simple parts and nothing exists except what is simple or is it the other way around, and there is nothing simple in the world? The third antinomy, which is probably the most important one – since it will occupy the whole *Critique of Practical Reason*²²², where we, who were taken to be mere phenomena in nature, will be granted the status of things in themselves in the kingdom of ends –, deals with the existence of freedom as a specific type of causality. The thesis assumes the existence of causality through freedom, while the antithesis asserts that everything in the world happens solely in accordance with the laws of nature. Finally, the fourth antinomy concerns the existence of a first cause, that is, whether or not there exists, either inside or outside the world, a necessary being as its cause (this is the antinomy of the contingency or necessity of the world). Allow me to remind, to reiterate, that the theses and antitheses of the first two antinomies are considered to be both

²¹⁹ Guyer, *Kant*, p. 138.

²²⁰ Once again, see Guyer's illuminating explanation in Guyer, *Ibid.*, p. 139.

²²¹ Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, Bxxx, p. 117.

²²² Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, translated by Werner Pluhar (Indianapolis: Hackett, 2002).

false, while the second group has theses and antitheses that are taken to be both true, but in different orders, one in the order of phenomena, and the latter in the order of noumena. I will not follow the thread of Kant's intricate argumentation to demonstrate how this is so, and rather only sum up the conclusions to be drawn.²²³

One important aspect to note, and which Ricœur mentions in passing, is that since the antinomies are deeply ingrained within our own reason, all we can do is to neutralize them, never fully destroying them.²²⁴ This is testament to the fact that reason is impelled to fall prey to the aforementioned temptation of looking for an object of totality and that in doing so and by reaching contrary compelling possibilities, this conflict of reason with itself is almost ineluctable. Critical philosophy is there to exercise constant vigilance, but this active stance must be perpetually reinforced. Ultimately, Kant pretends to have solved the conflict of the antinomies with his distinction between phenomena and noumena. This is why the noumenon is a limit phenomenon, and it is here that Ricœur finds Kant's "philosophy of limits" which he tries to appropriate for himself. The result is that this limit configures the frontier which Ricœur constantly – or almost – forbids his philosophy to cross. So even though Ricœur's philosophy will be mutable and ever-changing in its own creative hermeneutical way, some limits are never crossed, and these limits are, properly speaking, the objectification of totality, the grasping of the unconditioned. So the pieces of the Ricoeurian puzzle keep changing, but let us say that its outer contours remain the same, because they are provided by the Kantian framework. At the same time, this theoretical affirmation of finitude opens up in Kant a space to be filled by his practical philosophy and the affirmation of freedom through the subject's autonomy. As Victoria S. Wike emphasizes, "theoretical reason makes possible the discovery of the object and the task of practical reason."²²⁵ Theoretical reason makes way for practical reason as the domain of human freedom and autonomy, since its cartography was chartered since the first critique.

Nevertheless, to assert that within the framework of Kantian practical philosophy human beings are postulated as being free and autonomous is not tantamount to saying that action is unimpeded and free from conflict. If, in its

²²³ For a very detailed account of the origin and resolution of the antinomies, both theoretical and practical, see Victoria S. Wike, *Kant's Antinomies of Reason*, *op. cit.*

²²⁴ Ricœur, "Kant et la négation", p. 8475.

²²⁵ Victoria S. Wike, *Kant's Antinomies of Reason*, p. 162.

theoretical use, reason was directly at odds with itself, in its practical use reason will be in conflict with what Kant calls pathological inclinations. So a whole new conflictual domain will open up as a consequence. And even though this new domain will be less important for Ricœur's theoretical framework than the first critique was – even if, moreover, Ricœur is far more critical of Kant's practical philosophy than of his theoretical philosophy, especially in *Oneself as Another* – this new domain, and Ricœur's reaction to it deserve to be briefly mentioned.

1.2.4 – Kant's practical philosophy: the conflict of maxims in moral philosophy, radical evil and the unsocial sociability

This section will take a look at the main occurrences of conflict in Kant's moral and political philosophy, as well as in his philosophy of religion. Kant defined moral action as obedience to the categorical imperative. This notion, introduced for the first time in the *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals* has three main formulations, but it is the first one which interests us the most here: “act only in accordance with that maxim through which you can at the same time will that it become a universal law.”²²⁶

According to Kant's own terminology, a maxim is a “subjective principle of volition”. Since Kant adopts a strictly universalist standpoint, the goal of moral action is to adapt one's subjective maxim to the “objective” principle of volition, i.e. “the practical principle for all rational beings”.²²⁷ This is the exact definition of moral law, in the context of Kant's practical philosophy. However, Kant acknowledges that our maxims can be guided in different directions. Moral action entails *respect* for the law, but there might be occasions in which I am *inclined* to proceed otherwise. These are all key concepts in Kant's practical philosophy. While inclination stands for empirical motivations (i.e., in the most prosaic form, I am inclined to eat because I am hungry) or at most to serve hypothetical imperatives, like the quest for happiness (in which case, the deed done serves an instrumental purpose). However, as is well known, Kant's stance is anti-eudaimonist; in case of doubt, if one should have to choose between obeying the

²²⁶ Kant, *Groundwork of the Metaphysics of Morals*, edited by Mary Gregor (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), p. 31.

²²⁷ Kant, *ibid.*, p. 14.

moral law, or being happy, Kant certainly chooses the former, even if it comes at the cost of the subject's misery.

This anti-eudaimonist stance leads Kant to treat self-love in a rather harsh manner. Self-love is in fact an empirical inclination and as such must be excluded from the moral law.²²⁸ Kant goes so far as to state that what motivates us to do the right thing, namely, our feeling of respect for the law, is in itself a feeling of *humiliation* – humiliation of self-love. And this because, it seems, only if we let go of our attachment to our own particular self do we take the universal standpoint and become autonomous. In his practical philosophy, Kant thus rejects inclinations as being *pathological* (either immediate inclination, or instrumental inclination), probably because they are empirical, and can have the power of distracting or removing us from the strict obedience to moral law.

What I want to emphasize in this process is that, therefore, Kant acknowledges that in order for an action to be done “from duty” (and not merely in accordance with duty) there is a conflict of maxims that is played out, and if I am to act morally, respect for the law must ultimately win over all types of pathological inclination. Doing the right thing for the right type of motive (or maxim) is precisely what Kant defines as having (or being) a “good will”.

Now, Ricœur is heavily critical of this exclusion of the empirical from moral philosophy. In *Oneself as Another*, adopting a neo-Aristotelian stance (of which more in part five of this thesis) Ricœur seeks to ground the moral norm in the eudemonistic desire to live well. But for it to be possible, he needs to find the mediations between the two notions; and in adopting this procedure he follows a strategy very different from Kant's. Indeed, he characterizes Kant's formulation of the categorical imperative as “a logic of exclusion”.²²⁹ Indeed, for him, there is no valid reason to morally oppose self-esteem. And this because in Ricœur's own ethical proposal, self-respect will be the formalized version of self-esteem.

Another critique that Ricœur addresses to Kant's moral philosophy concerns Kant's belief that what must be done is always in each case self-evident. In fact, Ricœur contends, there might be occasions in which there is not *one* duty but rather *several* duties in conflict, but I will leave this discussion for chapter 5.2 below. This brings the presence of conflict within Kant's moral philosophy to a

²²⁸ Kant, *Critique of Practical Reason*, *op. cit.*, p. 98.

²²⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 211.

new level, not only is there a conflictual process of selection of maxims through the exclusion of pathological inclinations, but even if the goal is moral action (for its own sake) irreconcilable moral duties might be at stake. I think this is sufficient proof of how negation is also at stake as a formal procedure in Kant's practical philosophy. Once again, the temptation – in this case, to act according to our inclinations – must be avoided.

But this depiction assumes a more dramatic tone when we change the background from Kant's moral philosophy to his philosophy of religion. I mentioned above how Kant strongly asserted that he had to “deny knowledge” so that there could be room for faith. For obvious reasons, nowhere will this assertion be made more evident than in his philosophy of religion. Indeed, in *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*²³⁰ what we find is some form of rationalized religion with strong links to moral philosophy, and maintaining the strict separation from phenomena and noumena inherited from the first *Critique*. Kant still places the “good will” as a supreme value, as he did before in the *Groundwork*, and he still discusses the maxims of our will. Nevertheless, in what is a striking mix of a Protestant Christianity tradition and a strongly rationalistic background that has often been highlighted by Kantian scholars²³¹, Kant postulates a far darker possibility: what happens if our will wants evil?

In the first part of the book, the so-called “essay on radical evil”, Kant argues that human beings have a “natural propensity” to evil, which, however, is not to be confused with our “original predisposition” to good. This terminology can be somewhat puzzling, but Kant seems to be asserting that even though we are originally good, there is a certain perversion that conditions us to want evil. The subtlety resides in considering that the original predisposition is necessary, whereas the natural propensity is contingent (as this can be read as the fall from good to evil). As human beings, we are equally drawn by the moral law, and by the inclinations stemming from our moral nature. As Gordon Michalson points out, the problem lies in the priority of the sensuous over the moral: “radical evil is the freely-willed choice of an evil “ground” of maxim-making that results in the

²³⁰ Kant, *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, translated by Allen Wood and George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998).

²³¹ See for instance the introduction to Gordon E. Michalson, Jr, *Fallen Freedom. Kant on Radical Evil and Moral Regeneration* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990).

subordination of the moral incentive to the sensuous as a regular, ongoing policy in one's successive acts of maxim-making.”²³²

Therefore, it is because the moral incentive is given a secondary role that one's actions can be deemed evil. The fault is not on sensuous inclinations or desires themselves; it rather lies on the ground which makes possible the formulation of maxims itself, and the motives to which priority is given. Whether or not we are really free in choosing this ground is a matter of contention, because the propensity to evil certainly conditions our, let us say, empirical capacity of following the moral law.

So we can see that in Kant's mature philosophy of religion there is a battle between two principles which is, in a way, not very different from Plato's chariot allegory, in that they are mutually contradictory and both deeply ingrained within our soul. The mere title of the second book of *Religion within the Boundaries of Mere Reason*, namely “Concerning the battle of the good against the evil principle for dominion over the human being” is sufficient proof of this pervasive conflict of, as Kant sees it, good and evil in the exercise of our freedom. The third book will precisely try to establish the principles through which we could restore our freedom, that is, our capacity to act morally in following the law and this will be, for Kant, the object of religion.

Kant's claims in this respect might seem somewhat perplexing, and even clash with the strong affirmation of freedom and autonomy of his practical philosophy. The way I see it, they only emphasize the dramatic experience of existence: without denying autonomy, they emphasize the heavy burden of heteronomy constitutively weighing in on existence and human choice. Ricœur notes in passing, with Nabert, that the way these two principles clash in the formation of maxims is seen as a recovery of the early notion of real opposition from the 1763 essay, which seemed to have been diluted in the first *Critique* and now resurfaces in the *Religion* essay²³³ – that is, that they are both intensive magnitudes with opposing forces. It is perhaps not exaggerated to say that for Kant this ultimate clash was decisive for the fate of human freedom and moral action. Ricœur, for his part, adopted the Kantian framework in his philosophy of religion

²³² Michalson, *Ibid.*, p. 30.

²³³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 217.

too; he emphasizes the place of hope in philosophy and religion²³⁴, and puts forward analyzes of evil inspired by Kant.²³⁵

Ultimately, Kant wanted to restore us to our own original condition as he saw it. This wish of restoration or reconciliation – always mixed up with conflict – also resurfaces in his political philosophy. In *The Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*²³⁶, which is a brief article that was published in the *Berlinische Monatsschrift* in Kant's mature period – much like the famous “What is Enlightenment?” had been years before – we find a programmatic political proposal mixed up with an attempt at devising a philosophy of history geared towards peace and progress. In spite of its brevity, this is an important text that has been given much attention in recent decades, given the Kantian framework that has dominated Anglo-Saxon political philosophy in recent years, as well as the establishment of supranational political institutions in the second half of the 20th century.

Through his depiction of progress, Kant is attuned with one of the most overarching beliefs of the Enlightenment; and in fact, in this small text, we find an early elaboration of the teleological judgment that he would develop in the third *Critique*. The text is divided in nine theses, or “propositions” which Kant enunciates without giving them more than a cursory explanation. Kant states that our natural predispositions develop purposively (teleological judgment, first proposition) and that in our case this is to happen completely in the species, and not the individual (second proposition). After asserting that this completion is to be attained through the powers of our reason (third proposition), Kant arrives at what is for us the most important proposition, namely the fourth, where he claims:

The means nature employs in order to bring about the development of all their predispositions is their antagonism in society, insofar as the latter is in the end the cause of their lawful order. Here I understand by “antagonism” the *unsociable sociability* of

²³⁴ Ricœur, “Freedom in the light of hope” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 402-424.

²³⁵ Other than the *Symbolism of Evil*, see Ricœur, *Evil: A Challenge to Philosophy and Theology*, translated by John Bowden (London: Continuum, 2007).

²³⁶ I am following the translation found in Amélie Oksenberg Rorty and James Schmidt (ed.), *Kant's Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim. A Critical Guide* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2009).

human beings, i.e. their propensity to enter into society, which, however, is combined with a thoroughgoing resistance that constantly threatens to break up this society.²³⁷

Now, as a social philosopher, this is Kant at his best. He captures the inner tension that makes up our two “predispositions”, as he calls them: tendency to socialize, tendency to isolate oneself. Propensity to autonomy, propensity to community. According to Kant, it is because we find (social) resistance in the accomplishment of our own will that “our powers” are “awakened” and we are propelled to overcome indolence. And this happens amid our fellows, whom we “cannot *stand*” but also “cannot *leave alone*”. We can evidently see in this depiction something of the liberal principles of competition leading to market and prosperity; something akin to Kant’s own version of the invisible hand. However, much more is at stake. It is this process that leads human beings towards society as a “*moral whole*”.²³⁸

This “moral whole” evidently reminds us of an organic image of society, and which brings Hegel to mind; Kant goes even further, suggesting something also not very far from the Hegelian guile of reason: “The human being wills concord; but nature knows better what is good for his species: it wills discord.”²³⁹ As we can see, the desire for reconciliation is present; but discord is kept as an instrumental way of getting there. At the same time, this seems very close to the Heraclitean standpoint we have mentioned above. In other words, and evidently without being aware of it, Kant is describing a process whose formulation could very well be called “dialectical”, no longer in the sense attributed to it in the first *Critique*, but in the sense that Hegel will later develop, and which will be one of the main objects of the next chapter.

In the remainder of the essay, Kant postulated the need for the establishment of a “civil society universally administering right” in which there would be something like a rule-governed antagonism, that is, a mutual coordination of different freedoms (more or less like in Hobbes) but at the international level; evidently, Kant foreshadows what our own supranational institutions attempted to emulate in the 20th century. But he does this while at the

²³⁷ Kant’s *Idea for a Universal History with a Cosmopolitan Aim*, p. 13.

²³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

²³⁹ *Ibid.*

same time admitting that this is “the most difficult” problem to be solved by the human species, and also the one who will probably be solved the latest. In this forecast, he was probably right.

I will not venture any further in my incursion in Kantianism. I hope to have shown how negation is pervasive in Kant’s philosophy, and how it instantiates itself in so many different conflicts, of which the antinomies are the apex. I think I have also shown that Ricœur finds in Kant a model of conflict whose result is a standstill, a 0, nothing, lack of movement, not because there are no forces at stake, but because they mutually cancel each other out. This is the model of real opposition from the 1763 essay. What Ricœur also draws from Kant, as we have seen, is the distinction between noumenon and phenomenon, and the restriction of knowledge in a philosophy of limits that leaves some space open for different possibilities, but whose status is that of belief, or faith. Finally, I think it has been demonstrated that there is a hint of something like a dialectical type of thinking in Kant too (albeit taking into account the strict limits of the first *Critique*) but one whose real productivity will only be apparent in Hegel. In his philosophy, this paradoxical mix of conflict and reconciliation will attain a different status. As we will see in the next chapter, in Hegel Ricœur will find a different model of conflict, one whose productivity is immense. But the Kantian framework will be there to prevent it from spinning out of control, or falling into temptation. Ricœur will also continue to draw inspiration from Hegel, both in form and content, throughout his whole career. Kant will resurface, with a greater or lesser degree of influence, in the depiction of human fallibility in *Fallible Man*, in the analyzes of the phenomenon of evil in *The Symbolism of Evil*, in one of the instances of recognition in *The Course of Recognition*, in the post-Hegelian Kantianism of the *Conflict of Interpretations*, and so forth. However, I prefer not to anticipate now these reflections, and postpone their respective discussions for the remainder of the thesis. As we will see in the next chapter, there is one particular article, namely “Freedom in the Light of Hope”, the programmatic text in which Ricœur defines his “Post-Hegelian Kantianism”, that recaps in a condensed manner almost all the features of Kant’s philosophy that we have seen were important for him, in this chapter. This will be the proof of his strong adhesion to Kantianism, amid the heart of Hegelianism. But for now, we will have to depict Kant’s counterpart, Hegel.

Surely, much has happened in German philosophy, between Kant and Hegel. Nonetheless, I will need to keep the discussion of German Idealism out of this thesis, as I would be utterly incapable of doing justice to it; to this subjective limitation is added an objective ground: Fichte and Schelling, to name only the two great representatives of this period, were for Ricœur far less important than Kant and Hegel. For this reason, I will jump straight into Hegelian philosophy.

1.3 – Hegel on Negativity and Dialectic: Productive Conflict

As Robert Williams discouragingly reminds us, there are more than ten thousand books written on Hegel and his philosophy²⁴⁰ (and counting). Indeed, Hegelian thought is as fertile as it is painstakingly complex. Now, this complexity of his writings and the overabundance of secondary bibliography notwithstanding, allow me to try to tackle some of the main questions of his philosophy which interest me for the purposes of this thesis, and this in a mere chapter of half a hundred pages. The audacity of the enterprise will perhaps be forgiven if the reader keeps in mind that no one was fully Hegelian except perhaps Hegel himself, that his thought allowed for more different and conflicting interpretations and schools than perhaps any other thinker in history, and that I am only interested in the parts of the system which we can, and in fact do use, in our own – some call it “postmetaphysical” – day and age.

I will divide this chapter into the analysis of Hegel and the reception of Hegel and Hegelian philosophy in 20th century France, in order to then reach its reception in Ricœur. The detour through the French reception will provide us with a clearer picture of the context and significance of Hegel(ianism) for Ricœur. In Hegel, I will mostly concentrate on the phenomena of his practical philosophy, and more specifically on recognition, taking Habermas, Honneth, Pippin and Williams as my guides, as well as in his own definition of dialectic. This will provide me the opportunity to isolate (if it even makes sense to isolate anything whatsoever in the thought of Hegel) the two major occurrences of conflict – or at least the two which interest me the most – in Hegelian philosophy. With the struggle for recognition, we will see conflict as a practical phenomenon, guiding a theory of intersubjectivity – mostly in the Jena period – and consciousness formation (in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*). For the definition of dialectic, I will refer to Hegel’s more complex, mature philosophy, such as it appears in the *Encyclopedia* and in the *Science of Logic*, only to see how through his own definition we find a notion of “creative conflict” configuring the most ambitious and powerful speculative system ever devised in the history of mankind. I will also mention, in a cursory manner, Jean Wahl, Jean Hyppolite and most of all Eric

²⁴⁰ See Robert R. Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition* (Berkeley and L.A.: University of California Press, 1997), p. xi.

Weil as three instances of the reception of Hegel which were decisive for Ricœur. Of these, the most important is perhaps Weil, because of his professed Post-Hegelian Kantianism. I will also mention in passing the *Philosophy of Right* and Hegel's philosophy of objective spirit because, at one point in the critical juncture of the 1970s, Ricœur will define the "place" of dialectic as being situated in human praxis, and the philosophy of objective spirit as the main trait he wishes to recover from Hegel. It is at this critical juncture, I will argue, that Ricœur will be closer to Hegel(ianism).

In the second part of the chapter I will thus follow the thread of Ricœur's reception and assessment of Hegel and Hegelianism. This reception and assessment was, to say the least, in itself conflictual, as Ricœur seems to have struggled with Hegel's shadow for a long time, ultimately a bit uncertain about how best to deal with his philosophy. Ricœur's use of Hegelian philosophy ranges from enthusiastic apology to painful mourning, with a meaningful recuperation of specific parts of Hegel's analyzes and many cautions against the "dangers" involved in Hegelianism. Nonetheless, in the last analysis, Hegel proves to be an influence almost as decisive for Ricœur as was Kant; as such, I will provide a diagnosis of Ricœur's Post-Hegelian Kantianism at the end of the chapter. These will necessarily be extremely succinct analyzes, for lack of space, but in this condensed *gigantomachia*, we will find a very important key to Ricœur's philosophy.

1.3.1 – Hegel in Jena: the dawn of recognition and an alternative practical philosophy

Before delving into the very technical and difficult definitions of dialectics provided in Hegel's mature philosophy, allow me to mention the renaissance of Hegelian studies nowadays. Indeed, after the rejection of Popper and many Post-Modern thinkers, after the persistent emphasis on methodological (or plainly ethical, psychological or logical) individualism and Rawlsian-style contractualism and constructivism, I think it is fair to say that the second half of the 20th century was by and large anti-Hegelian. Some notable exceptions appeared in France, where Hegel was very popular during a period of time. But

even there he was criticized as much as he was popular. Today, a different kind of Hegelian renaissance is taking place.

But the neo-Hegelian recovery has come through very specific means and topics. It is not his metaphysics, his philosophy of history or even his aesthetics that have been given much attention. Rather, in recent years, it has been his ethics, his social theory, his philosophy of “objective spirit” and institutionalism that have been reassessed and translated to contemporary terms.

What interests political philosophers and social scientists alike is Hegel’s holism, his depiction of ethical and communal life, his views on intersubjectivity, consciousness formation, purposive rationality, agent causation, origins of normativity, the birth and death of institutions, and so forth. This is the reason why I strongly agree with Robert Pippin when he underscores that at the heart of Hegelianism there is a strong emphasis on practical philosophy.²⁴¹ This practical philosophy can be understood in contemporary terms as going against the grain of methodological individualism and as attributing free action to an agent if and only if this makes sense to him or herself. According to Pippin, this practical reason is “a kind of interchange of attempts at justification among persons each of whose actions affects what others would otherwise be able to do, and all this for a community at a time.”²⁴² Central to his account is a depiction of individual freedom that is not independent from one’s own institutions, already-existing (not abstractly constructed) normative frameworks and historical evolution. As Pippin makes clear, Hegel thinks “*we make ourselves into actual agents over historical time.*”²⁴³ If I recognize myself in my actions, I will have to own up to them, to recognize myself in them. This is consistent with Ricœur’s own phenomenological analyzes of action, and also with what he called imputation of oneself in *Oneself as Another* and recognition-attestation of oneself in *The Course of Recognition*.

Pippin also forcefully underscores that freedom for Hegel is “a collectively achieved relational state, ‘being with self in an other’”²⁴⁴ (or, as Hegel poetically put it, *Das ich im wir*). What I want to start looking at, also because of the status this notion attained in our own contemporary world, is one of the main

²⁴¹ See Robert B. Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy. Rational Agency as Ethical Life* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2008).

²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 7.

²⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

processes through which this collectively achieved relational state is arrived at, namely, recognition.

Now, recognition is almost omnipresent in Hegel's philosophy, from its inception up until the late works. As early as 1802-1803, when Hegel was working on his draft of the *System of Ethical Life*²⁴⁵ ("ethical life" here being the translation of *Sittlichkeit*, with all its communitarian connotations), still a work inspired by Schelling, we can find a depiction of recognition as an intersubjective process. In this writing, Hegel starts by describing what he calls "natural ethical life", which is nothing more than the transition of different levels of intersubjective relationships, from mere natural forms such as family, to legal relations and ultimately to state. The same account of intersubjective recognition holds for his first attempts to devise a philosophy of spirit, the so-called "Real Philosophy"²⁴⁶ of the Jena period (which had two versions and comprises both a philosophy of nature and a philosophy of spirit).

Throughout Hegel's whole career, recognition will be depicted as a dialectical phenomenon bouncing back and forth between conflict and reconciliation. Its ties with other cardinal notions of Hegel's philosophy, such as freedom, institutions and spirit, are important. As Robert Williams contends, "recognition is not only the existential phenomenological shape of the concept of freedom but also the general intersubjective structure and pattern of Hegel's concept of spirit."²⁴⁷ However, nowhere else than in the Jena period is this process more clearly situated in the realm of human affairs and the intersubjective constitution of human relationships. As both Honneth²⁴⁸ and Ricœur²⁴⁹ emphasized, Hegel's early political philosophy can be understood as a recontextualization of the motives of social conflict. Over against Hobbes' own depiction of the state of nature as a struggle of every man against every man, and

²⁴⁵ G. W. F. Hegel, *System of Ethical Life and First Philosophy of Spirit*, translated by Thomas Knox (New York: State University of New York, 1979).

²⁴⁶ The first version of the *Realphilosophie* dates from 1803-1804 and the second version from 1805-1806. We can find a translation of the first version, in English, in the reference provided in the preceding footnote. The version which I will quote and briefly analyze is the second version, from 1805-1806. See *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A translation of the Jena lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-06) with commentary*, by Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983).

²⁴⁷ Robert Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, p.xi.

²⁴⁸ See Axel Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition. The Moral Grammar of Social Conflicts*, translated by Joel Anderson (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1995), p. 5.

²⁴⁹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 171 ff.

the need to establish a covenant for fear of violent death, Hegel sees social conflict as being motivated by moral reasons.

When Hegel speaks about *Sittlichkeit* he is alluding to the specific conformation of a collective *ethos*. For him, the ideal model of a city and its people was the Greek ancient *polis* and when he criticizes what came to be known as “atomism” as a social ill, he is alluding to pre-established intersubjective consensuses that exist through collective mores. These, in turn, are grounded in processes of reciprocal recognition through which each partner of interaction is supposed to validate and accept his or her fellow citizens. As such, and over against Kant’s and the liberal tradition’s own insistence on individual autonomy, Hegel will contend that our own individual freedom constitutively depends upon collective contexts of meaningful interaction and support.

And this is, I think, the touchstone of Hegel’s ethics of recognition. Robert Williams insightfully speaks about recognition as an “operative concept” in Hegel (in the sense attributed to it by Eugen Fink²⁵⁰) in that even though Hegel does not explicitly turn it into a category and often refrains from describing it thematically, it is nonetheless almost omnipresent and serves to explain other, thematic concepts. Thus spirit is born out of reciprocal recognition in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, for instance. In a nutshell, and to continue using Williams’ masterful analyzes, the cornerstone of Hegel’s ethics reaches us through his own analysis of recognition: “The threshold of the ethical is reached when the other comes to count”.²⁵¹ And through Hegel’s own evolving views on the particular organization of the patterns of recognition (from the intersubjective standpoint of Jena to the more institutional standpoint of his mature philosophy) we learn where and how recognition can unfold: according to Hegel, in love, abstract right, civil society, and the state.

But let me summarize, first of all, how the concept appears in the Jena period, as well as its conceptual origins. As Honneth, Williams, and other Hegel scholars contend, there seems to have been a direct influence of Fichte, as well as,

²⁵⁰ See Eugen Fink, “Operative concepts in Husserl’s *Phenomenology*”, translated by William McKenna, in *A Priori and World: European Contributions to Husserlian Phenomenology*, ed. W. McKenna, R. M. Harlan and L. E. Winters (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1981), pp. 56-70. Quoted by Williams, p. 1.

²⁵¹ Williams, *Hegel’s Ethics of Recognition*, p. 7.

perhaps to a minor extent, of Rousseau. Honneth reconstructs the Fichtean influence:

In his essay, 'The Foundations of Natural Law', Fichte had conceived of recognition as the 'reciprocal effect' [*Wechselwirkung*] between individuals that underlies legal relations: by both mutually requiring one another to act freely and limiting their own sphere of action to the other's advantage, subjects form a common consciousness which then attains objective validity in legal relations.²⁵²

Honneth then proceeds to show how Hegel extends Fichte's model of recognition, stripping it from its transcendental status, and transforming those spheres in "communicative forms of life". Moreover, Fichte's model of recognition and its emphasis on "summons" displays an interesting mode of interaction which curiously comes close to Ricœur's own model of voluntary, one-sided recognition which is supposed to elicit a response not by forcing it, but by inviting our partners of interaction to recognize us, as we recognize them. This similarity has been detected by Williams, in his book review of *The Course of Recognition*.²⁵³ The alleged influence from Rousseau, on the other hand, comes from the *Discourse on the Origins of Inequality* which we have considered above, namely, when Rousseau speaks about "mutual esteem" and "reciprocal honor" among men, such that any crime transforms itself into insult. One of Hegel's most striking innovations in relation to both Fichte and Rousseau, however, is the way alternating phases of conflict and reconciliation are seen as the evolution between recognition patterns in a dynamic process.

And this is why, Honneth argues, Hegel finds a different and original solution, opposed to Hobbes's own depiction. Rather than going from an all-out struggle to a definitive pacification through social contract (whose sole motivation is, we have seen, self-preservation) in Hegel "this struggle leads, as a moral medium, from an underdeveloped state of ethical life to a more mature level of ethical relations."²⁵⁴ This will be rather self-explanatory in Hegel's later writings. But it is already present in the *System of Ethical Life*, and namely in its second

²⁵² Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 16.

²⁵³ See Robert Williams, "Ricœur on Recognition", in *European Journal of Philosophy* 16:3 (2008): 467-473.

²⁵⁴ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 17.

chapter, “The negative freedom, or transgression”. In it, and when commenting all sorts of possible crimes encompassed under the heading of “transgression”, Hegel asserts that what is at stake is honor itself, and thus, recognition. So we have a first glimpse of what will be the struggle for recognition, and its value over against the value of life itself:

Denial here is an injury to life. But because this indifference has over against it the abstraction of the injured particularity, through the latter the former is posited ideally too, and what is injured is *honour*. Through honour the singular detail becomes something personal and a whole, and what is seemingly only the denial of a detail is an injury of the whole, and thus there arises the battle of one whole person against another whole person. (...) honour indeed has been injured, but honour is distinguishable from life. And since life is brought into play in order to restore to honour its reality, which as injured honour is only ideal, the linking of the ideality of honour with its reality is achieved only by raising to full reality the specific aspect injured; and honour consists in this, that once one specific aspect is negated, then life, or the totality of specific aspects, is to be affected too. Thus the man’s own life must be brought in question as the means whereby alone that negation of a single detail is made into a whole as it should be.²⁵⁵

Commenting on this and close passages, Honneth notes that honor is tied to a positive appreciation of the totality of one’s peculiar features; this positive relation to self as a totality adopting many different shapes will later assume particular relevance in the context of Honneth’s own reactualization of recognition. But the particular point to emphasize is how Hegel uses negation or the negative in order to advance from one sphere to another. Admittedly, at this point, Hegel’s philosophy is still a sketch, a draft. He already includes a chapter on the state as the point in which the individual becomes a concrete universal, but he cannot fully develop and ground it.

A further step towards a more systematic depiction of the struggle for recognition as a social model of evolution through conflict is given in the so-called “Real philosophy” of the Jena period. In these lectures Hegel definitively abandons both the terminology and the method of Schelling. These are his first attempts at a philosophy of spirit and the formation of consciousness. From this

²⁵⁵ Hegel, *System of Ethical life*, pp. 137-139.

moment on, Hegel will conceive spirit as having the capacity to go out of itself, in order to later come back, in its development process. This movement, in turn, will be seen as structuring and providing meaning to the whole of reality. In this particular work, spirit will go through the three stages of its concept (part I), what Hegel calls Actual Spirit (Part II) and Constitution (Part III).

In its first stage, spirit is conceived as intelligence and will. Hegel contends that immediately, spontaneously, spirit is intelligence and thus maintains a purely cognitive stance towards nature. As soon as it begins developing a practical relation towards nature, it becomes will.²⁵⁶ Now, at this stage, Hegel distinguishes between different types of relation we can develop towards the world, such as the drive (*Trieb*), work (*Werk*), labor (*Arbeit*) and the development of instruments (*Werkzeuge*). What distinguishes human beings from animals is that we do not necessarily immediately consume objects as soon as there is a feeling of lack; the logic of our desire is more complex than that. On the contrary, we produce objects by means of labor; eventually, by the construction of instruments and machines, we come to dominate nature through cunning (*List*).

It is also at this stage that Hegel includes some of the first detailed descriptions of love as a positive phenomenon of mutual recognition:

To be sure, they approach one another with uncertainty and timidity, yet with trust, for each knows itself immediately in the other, and the movement is merely the inversion whereby each realizes that the other knows itself likewise in its other. This reversal also rests in the fact that each gives up its independence. (...) This self-negation is one's being for another, into which one's immediate being is transformed. Each one's self-negation becomes, for each, the other's being for the other. Thus the other is for me, i.e., it knows itself in me.²⁵⁷

As we can see, love is taken to be the most natural, and first form of recognition, as well as the one in which the relation can tend towards a state of fusion, mutually letting go of one's own independence. Also in the same section, Hegel for the first time mentions the state of nature²⁵⁸ and explicitly refutes Hobbes's need for a social contract. In fact, according to this claim, we do not need the

²⁵⁶ See Hegel, *Jena Lectures in the Philosophy of Spirit*, pp. 99 ff.

²⁵⁷ *Ibid.* p. 107.

²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 110 ff.

fiction of a social contract artificially conferring rights to each individual because even in the state of nature, and in virtue of the natural rights recognized in intersubjective reciprocal relationships, we already have what the artificial contract is supposed to establish. Allow me to quote the passage where this is made clear.

Right is the relation of persons, in their behavior, to others. It is the universal element of their free being—the determination, the limitation of their empty freedom. I need not spell out this relation or limitation for myself and produce it; rather, the object, in general, is itself this creation of right, i.e., the relation of recognition. (...) Man is necessarily recognized and necessarily gives recognition. This necessity is his own, not that of our thinking in contrast to the content. As recognizing, man is himself the movement [of recognition], and this movement itself is what negates (*hebt auf*) his natural state: he is recognition;²⁵⁹

Commenting on this passage, Honneth spells out Hegel's claim. According to Honneth, what Hegel shows is that in natural situations of competition, the solution need not come by the means of the law (i.e., by a social contract). Even in such cases, attention must be drawn to pre-existing social relations which, as Honneth sees them, “guarantee a minimal normative consensus in advance”.²⁶⁰ In a nutshell, for Honneth, “subjects must have already recognized each other even before the conflict.”²⁶¹ The contract, in other words, is just the spelling out of a pre-existing normative standpoint.

Therefore, the remaining conflicts that Hegel analyzes in the “Real Philosophy”, and Honneth's own interpretation of them, are all geared towards moral motivations: social struggles are struggles for recognition. Even when what is at stake is possession, the whole of one's existence becomes entangled in the conflict. This is consistent with the prior analyzes of the *System of Ethical Life* we have seen above. Already in Jena, this struggle is seen as a struggle for life and death, and in which the desire for recognition is put over and above the value we grant to our own life. Honneth interprets the life-and-death struggle as a sign that each partner engaging in the struggle acknowledges that the other is a vulnerable

²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 111.

²⁶⁰ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 42.

²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

subject like him or herself, also a bearer of rights and normative expectations.²⁶² He traces back the source of the crime to the feeling of disrespect one experiences and that leads to the struggle.

In the subsequent parts of these Jena lectures, Hegel delineates the multiple spheres of recognition, and their respective negative counterparts (this in part two, with its descriptions of recognition in love, contract, and the negative of crime) and ultimately end up, as always, in a theory of the state and constitution. The state is seen to embody objective spirit and we are geared toward Hegel's model of a constitutional monarchy.

Both Habermas and Honneth see in these early Jena lectures the model for a Hegelian theory of intersubjectivity that they claim he drops in subsequent writings. Habermas, who was one of the first to systematically recover the value of these lectures for Hegel's practical philosophy, argues that the peculiar model of development through interaction and labor that Hegel presents in the Jena period is completely forgotten afterwards.²⁶³ In the early article "Labor and Interaction" Habermas emphasizes that in the Jena lectures Hegel includes the possibility of liberation through labor; with this remark, not only does the Hegelian analysis foreshadow Marx's later conceptualization of alienation, but he is also inscribed in what later would become the Critical Theory tradition. As Habermas puts it in this early essay, "Hegel links together labor and interaction under the viewpoint of emancipation from the forces of external as well as internal nature."²⁶⁴ Later, Habermas would come back to reassess Hegelian philosophy and to reappraise recognition. In the *Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*²⁶⁵ Habermas takes up once again Hegel's model of intersubjective recognition and considers it deserves the status of a "counterdiscourse of modernity". He tells us that Hegel could have followed that path, but instead chose to fall back into a philosophy of the subject hypostasized into absolute idealism. Thus it is, let us say, in the "spirit" of Hegel's early philosophy, not in the letter of the philosophy Hegel explicitly adopted for himself, and through a reconstruction of a Hegelian early intuition, that Habermas finds the means to counteract what he sees as a tendency in modernity to privilege

²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 48.

²⁶³ See Jürgen Habermas, "Labor and interaction: Remarks on Hegel's Jena *Philosophy of Mind*" in *Theory and Practice*, translated by John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1973), pp. 142-169.

²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 161.

²⁶⁵ Jürgen Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity. Twelve Lectures*, translated by Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: The M.I.T. Press, 1987).

monological reason. Williams, for his part, refuses Habermas's and Honneth's criticism of Hegel and their account, and argues that Hegel was *not* a proponent of monological reason or the closed system.²⁶⁶ He rather sees the dynamic version of recognition and collective *Sittlichkeit* as being present all the way through Hegel's mature reflections. In this criticism and cautions against the final form of Hegelian philosophy, Ricœur is probably closer to both Habermas and Honneth, than he is to Williams's standpoint.

In *The Course of Recognition* Ricœur follows in its main traits Honneth's reconstruction of the Hegel from the Jena period, complemented by Jacques Taminiaux's own commentary and translation of the "Real Philosophy" lectures.²⁶⁷ He further adds that "the specific spheres of recognition distinguished by Hegel do not constitute immutable configurations. They are historical compromises between speculative exigencies and empirical experience (...) They open a history of a struggle for recognition that continues to make sense in our own day so long as the institutional structure of recognition remains inseparable from the negative dynamism of the whole process, each institutional conquest responding to a specific negative threat."²⁶⁸ This last claim is in itself sufficient to attest that for Ricœur an attempt such as the one put forward by Honneth, that is, of "reactualizing recognition" in contemporary terms is a legitimate task. In later chapters, we will follow the thread of this possibility.

These lectures and drafts from the Jena period can be seen as a preparation for the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, Hegel's masterpiece from 1807 and which closes the Jena period. The *Phenomenology* is probably Hegel's most influential book, even if he himself was later to supersede it in his *Encyclopedia* and *Science of Logic*. It is also, by far, the book from Hegel that made a more lasting impression in 20th century French philosophy, including the philosophy of Paul Ricœur. It is also one of the books in which the struggle for recognition is more evident. Let me now turn my attention to it.

²⁶⁶ See Williams, *Hegel's Ethics of Recognition*, pp. 13-16.

²⁶⁷ Ricœur explicitly admits having Taminiaux and Honneth as his two guides for the reconstruction of Hegel's Jena philosophy in p. 174 of *The Course of Recognition*. See Jacques Taminiaux, *Naissance de la philosophie hégélienne de l'État* (Paris: Payot, 1984).

²⁶⁸ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, pp. 172-173.

1.3.2 – Recognition as consciousness formation. The lord-bondsman dialectic in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*

The *Phenomenology of Spirit* is something like a history of the spirit's struggle to overcome the obstacles to its own self-knowledge. As Hegel later saw it, the *Phenomenology* was meant to serve as an introduction to his own system, taken from the subject's viewpoint. As J. N. Findlay recalls in his foreword to the English translation of the *Phenomenology*, the book "is meant to be a forepiece that can be dropped and discarded once the student, through deep immersion in its contents, has advanced through confusions and misunderstanding to the properly philosophical point of view."²⁶⁹ There is therefore an ascetic dimension to this exercise; by embarking in this journey of the spirit, which is also our own journey, we leave the ordinary standpoint and arrive, through many pains, at the threshold of science. If successful, we could proceed as Wittgenstein suggests that his reader should do at the end of the *Tractatus*, namely, to "throw away the ladder after he has climbed up it".²⁷⁰ However, as Charles Taylor contends, there is more to the *Phenomenology* than this, insofar as "The very nature of Hegel's system of thought is that it shows all partial reality to be dependent on an absolute which in turn necessarily generates this partial reality. From this point of view, there is no reality, however humble and fragmentary, which can be thought to fall outside the system, and no transition between levels of reality whose explication could be considered a kind of *hors d'oeuvre*."²⁷¹

Taylor's caution against the easy disposal of the *Phenomenology* is there to remind us that there is an essential feature of the whole Hegelian system that is perhaps best captured in the *Phenomenology* than anywhere else, namely, the conflictual character of the struggle to attain self-knowledge. This is evidently omnipresent in Hegelian philosophy. But perhaps nowhere else is this conflictual character asserted more vividly than in the chapter "Independence and dependence of self-consciousness: Lordship and Bondage" of the *Phenomenology*. Now, there have been many readings of this chapter, and its significance has sometimes been

²⁶⁹ Findlay, Foreword to the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, p. v. See *Hegel's Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by A. V. Miller with analysis and foreword by J. N. Findlay (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1977).

²⁷⁰ Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, translated by D. F. Pears and B. F. McGuinness (London: Routledge, 2001), §6.54, p. 89.

²⁷¹ Charles Taylor, *Hegel* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975), p. 127.

synonymous with Hegel's overarching contribution to the history of philosophy. This is perhaps an oversimplification. But I will have to mention some of these readings, starting with Alexandre Kojève's, for its historical importance in the context of Hegel's French reception in the 20th century.

But let me first offer a few introductory remarks to the book before analyzing its most famous chapter. In the *Phenomenology of Spirit* we learn that consciousness is self-contradictory. Each new stage is brought forth as a negation of the preceding one, whose truth is only revealed *a posteriori*. It might seem as if the different objects which occupy consciousness, from perception to culture, history, religion and finally Absolute Knowing, were different objects coming to occupy center stage and be analyzed by consciousness in the traditional Cartesian distinction between subject and object. However, as the final paragraphs (§§86-89) of Hegel's introduction make clear, this is the same object all along, seen from a different perspective. Consciousness is a self-perceiving whole, whose alienation and return to itself is properly a process of clarification. The process is called phenomenological because it is supposed to describe things as they appear to consciousness, even if this description is very different from the ones that would later be given by Husserl and the phenomenological movement.

In terms of its form, the movement within the whole assumes a triadic shape and even though the final endpoint will be Absolute Knowing, it is important to stress that many different courses could be taken within the system. Hegel's own decision is to start from "sense-certainty" because this seems to be for him the most immediate, natural content of our own consciousness and to proceed from there by means of an organic development of the particular figures and shapes consciousness will assume. Unlike Kant, whose divisive and limiting function of the understanding Hegel often derides, the whole process assumes the form of a synthetic unity. As Hegel states in §20 of his magnificent preface, "The True is the whole. But the whole is nothing other than the essence consummating itself through its development."²⁷² Thus, for Hegel, as for Kant, albeit in a very different and more inclusive way, the development is immanent. In the Marxist-Hegelian tradition, the dialectical advance through negation and exploration of already-existing practices, ideals and so on will be granted the name of immanent

²⁷² Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §20, p. 11.

critique. The sources of this notion, and the form of determinate negation it puts forward, are to be found in §59 of the preface: “in speculative thinking the negative belongs to the content itself, and is *positive*, both as the *immanent* movement and determination of the content, and as the whole of this process. Looked at as a result, what emerges from this process is the *determinate* negative which is consequently a positive content as well.”²⁷³ This process, in turn, is supposed to assume, in Hegel, the consistence of a rationality that pervades and encompasses reality itself and that in order to be understood must be elevated to the dignity of philosophical concepts.

Also as in Kant, it seems to me that there is a certain type of asceticism present in Hegel, even if they assume radically different forms in each of these two philosophers, and lead to entirely different results. If, on the one hand, for Kant it is the asceticism of knowledge that keeps us from stepping outside the bounds of all possible experience and disrespecting the limit, for Hegel the asceticism comes through the form of the long mediation of reflection. But its result is precisely to go *beyond* immediate knowledge and, instead of conceiving the subject through already-made a priori forms, to have the patience to follow the painstakingly contradictory forms of human consciousness up until the Absolute itself. Hegel explicitly asserts the infringement of the category of limit through the concept of consciousness itself: “Consciousness, however, is explicitly the *Notion* of itself. Hence it is something that goes beyond limits, and since these limits are its own, it is something that goes beyond itself.”²⁷⁴ This asceticism can be grasped also by his use of certain expressions such as the labor of the negative – or as he famously puts it in §32 of the preface “looking the negative in the face, and tarrying with it”²⁷⁵, the labor of the concept (or, as Miller translates it, “the Notion”, i.e., *Begriff* – “True thoughts and scientific insight are only to be won through the labor of the Notion”²⁷⁶), or the patience of the concept. This patience and the asceticism it requires seem to me to be evident from the reading of §29: “But the *length* of this path has to be endured, each moment has to be *lingered* over, because each is itself a complete individual shape, and one is only viewed in absolute perspective when its determinateness is regarded as a concrete whole, or the whole is regarded as

²⁷³ *Ibid.*, §59 p. 36.

²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, §80 of the introduction, p. 51.

²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, §32, p. 19.

²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, §70, p. 43.

uniquely qualified by that determination”.²⁷⁷ This passage also offers further evidence of the circularity of the process and mutual interdependence between each moment of the course and its respective signifying whole. The result of this ascesis might be – or is perhaps intended to be – that philosophy again be considered a “serious business” as Hegel asserts in §67.²⁷⁸ It is perhaps ironic that Hegel’s own very complicated vocabulary and sometimes baffling and overambitious assertions have been the target of frequent critique and even mockery, perhaps as much or even more than praise and admiration.

Now, to reiterate, Hegel’s starting point in this particular occasion is in the act of knowledge. But consciousness will have to become self-consciousness or, in Hegel’s own terminology, what is “in itself” must become “for itself”. And this comes about by the work of Reason itself. Thus Hegel in §21: “Though the embryo is indeed *in itself* a human being, it is not so *for itself*; this it only is as cultivated Reason, which has *made* itself what is *in itself*.”²⁷⁹ I will not delve into §§90-165, or consciousness “in itself”, since they are not very important for our investigation. Hegel goes through the immediacy of sense data, its organization in perception and ultimately in the understanding.

However, it is as soon as consciousness becomes self-consciousness and when the process of knowing is superseded by a logic of *desire* that matters become interesting. At this point, it might be useful to distinguish the progress of the phenomenology and the priority of its elements *quoad se* and *quoad nos*. Judith Butler, in her masterful *Subjects of Desire. Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* notes that it is curious that while we can argue that the whole progress of the *Phenomenology* is impelled by desire, the thematic exposition of desire and its figures only appear in the fourth chapter of the book.²⁸⁰ This is explained by a (somewhat artificial, I concede) distinction between the ontological and the phenomenological levels. Indeed, desire is prior *quoad se*, as it is part of the immanent development logic of spirit; but its appearance to consciousness and, let us say, to the reader of the *Phenomenology* (so, *quoad nos*),

²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, §29, p. 17.

²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, §67, p. 41.

²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, §21, p. 12.

²⁸⁰ Judith P. Butler, *Subjects of Desire. Hegelian Reflections in Twentieth-Century France* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1987), p. 24.

takes place as soon as the figures of self-consciousness come into play, that is, after the exposition of consciousness in itself.

In virtue of this ontological status and primacy of desire, it must be grasped that this is in fact one of the keys for understanding the *Phenomenology*. The progress of consciousness is a progress of desire; not pure, simple desire, but rather *desire of desire*. As such, Hegel's odyssey of spirit can be seen – and setting aside for a moment its overambitious claim to explain world history, progress through purposive rationality, and so forth – as another philosophical attempt to explain human desire, to be added to the classical attempts of such descriptions like Plato's, and confronted to more contemporary attempts such as the ones provided by Freud, or Deleuze. This explains, in part, Kojève's own effort to re-read Hegel in strictly anthropological and political terms. Nonetheless, it must be added that perhaps in no other philosophical system did desire occupy such center stage, and in no other standpoint did it reach such speculative heights.

The thematic exposition of the dialectic of desire starts in the fourth chapter of the *Phenomenology*²⁸¹ with the section on “self-certainty” and “truth”, that is, as Charles Taylor explains, respectively what we claim to be, and what we truly are.²⁸² Taylor stresses how this dialectic is different from the preceding one. When the emphasis shifts from knowledge to desire and its fulfillment, no longer can we pretend to occupy a detached standpoint. Indeed, we are passionately attached to it. Certainly, when our notion of ourselves, when our self-understanding is proved to have been wrong and we are therefore forced, as it were, to adapt ourselves to a new truth (or let us say in more contemporary terms, a new interpretation) about our own being, this is not done without effort and pain. These specific instances of conflict and contradiction are therefore particularly virulent for the one who undergoes them. In the third part of this dissertation we will see Ricœur's own version of inner conflict and rift, not entirely Hegelian, but not without its resonances with Hegel either.

Ultimately, for Hegel, the closing of this dialectic will come at the end, when the subject is supposed to identify him or herself with his notion of infinity and the Absolute.²⁸³ Charles Taylor calls it the aspiration for “a state of total

²⁸¹ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §166, p. 104 ff.

²⁸² Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 148.

²⁸³ See Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §168, p. 106.

integrity”.²⁸⁴ At the end, we are supposed to picture ourselves as an emanation of the Absolute Spirit; as an embodied instance of the universal whole. This should be kept in mind. But for now let us concentrate on the struggle for recognition.

At the threshold of the chapter on lordship and bondage, right before the struggle begins, we find individuals as independent life-forms.²⁸⁵ In §174 Hegel equates for the first time self-consciousness with desire: “self-consciousness is Desire” (es ist *Begierde*)²⁸⁶. However, shortly afterwards, this assertion is complemented by its decisive qualification in §175: “*Self-consciousness achieves its satisfaction only in another self-consciousness.*” (*Das Selbstbewusstsein erreicht seine Befriedigung nur in einem andern Selbstbewusstsein*).²⁸⁷ Earlier in the same §175, Hegel explains that satisfaction (*Befriedigung*) depends on the object. And since the object of desire, in this case, is another consciousness, satisfaction must be attained through a dialectical process of negation. Thus the other is for me an object, but for him or herself he is a consciousness, and so it is I who am objectified by him or herself. As Taylor explains, in this process, I am (and so is the other) two things: both conscious life in the universal, and a living thing.²⁸⁸ But the particular kind of negation entailed here is not one that simply abolishes its object. The desire is constituted in such a form that new desires just keep being formed; as soon as one desire is satisfied, a new desire replaces it. To reiterate, this is what distinguishes human desire from animal desire. In animal desire, the consumption of the object (its negation) leaves the subject facing nothingness. In human desire, however, what is sought after is the recognition of other fellow human beings. Or, as Taylor puts it, “If he is to be fully at home this external reality must reflect back to him what he is”²⁸⁹ or at least this is what we strive for.

The last lines before the section on lordship and bondage reassert the positive unity that is provided through the insertion in universal spirit: “What still lies ahead for consciousness is the experience of what Spirit is – this absolute substance which is the unity of the different independent self-consciousnesses which, in their opposition, enjoy perfect freedom and independence: 'I' that is 'We'”

²⁸⁴ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 148.

²⁸⁵ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §171, pp. 107-108.

²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, §174, p. 109.

²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, §175, p. 110.

²⁸⁸ Charles Taylor p. 152.

²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*

and 'We' that is 'I'. It is in self-consciousness, in the Notion of Spirit, that consciousness first finds its turning-point, where it leaves behind it the colorful show of the sensuous here-and-now and the nightlike void of the supersensible beyond, and steps out into the spiritual daylight of the present.”²⁹⁰ As such, the importance of the following passage could not be overemphasized.

From the outset, Hegel asserts that self-consciousness “exists only in being acknowledged”²⁹¹ and that it is the duplication of this spiritual unity that will grant us access to the phenomenon of recognition. In §179 he describes the mutual objectification attested when two self-consciousnesses confront each other: “it does not see the other as an essential being, but in the other sees its own self”²⁹² and in §180 we are told that self-consciousness needs to “supersede the *other* independent being in order thereby to become certain of *itself* as the essential being”.²⁹³ The ground is therefore laid for all-out conflict to explode.

The following paragraphs could almost be read as a game of mimicry, with the dialectical style reaching a peak. There is in fact a reciprocal mirroring of each other’s actions: “Thus the movement is simply the double movement of the two self-consciousnesses. Each sees the other do the same as it does; each does itself what it demands of the other, and therefore also does what it does only in so far as the other does the same. Action by one side only would be useless because what is to happen can only be brought about by both.”²⁹⁴ Ultimately, as §184 makes clear, this interdependence in action is explained by a shared status: “They *recognize* themselves as *mutually recognizing* one another.”²⁹⁵

Opposition will start playing itself out as soon as there is a further division in self-consciousness. This is described in §185: “At first, it will exhibit the side of the inequality of the two, or the splitting-up of the middle term into the extremes which, as extremes, are opposed to one another, one being only *recognized*, the other only *recognizing*.”²⁹⁶ §186 proceeds by showing the dual status of the “other” as it is considered by each of the self-consciousnesses, both as an object and *another self-consciousness*: “What is 'other' for it is an unessential, negatively

²⁹⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §177, pp. 110-111.

²⁹¹ *Ibid.*, §178, p. 111.

²⁹² *Ibid.*, §179, p. 111.

²⁹³ *Ibid.*, §180, p. 111.

²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, §182, p. 112.

²⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, §184, p. 112.

²⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, §185, pp. 112-113.

characterized object. But the 'other' is also a self-consciousness; one individual is confronted by another individual. Appearing thus immediately on the scene, they are for one another like ordinary objects, independent shapes, individuals submerged in the being [or immediacy] of Life-for the object in its immediacy is here determined as Life.”²⁹⁷ So, at this moment, self-consciousness is still holding on to dear life, that is, to immediate and simple existence. Its processes of interaction – with itself in its doubled form, to be sure – still does not aim beyond mere existence.

And yet, suddenly, in §187, things take a dramatic turn. For its importance, I'll allow myself to quote it more fully:

The presentation of itself, however, as the pure abstraction of self-consciousness consists in showing itself as the pure negation of its objective mode, or in showing that it is not attached to any specific existence, not to the individuality common to existence as such, that it is not attached to life. (...) Thus the relation of the two self-conscious individuals is such that they prove themselves and each other through a life-and-death struggle. They must engage in this struggle, for they must raise their certainty of being for themselves to truth, both in the case of the other and in their own case. And it is only through staking one's life that freedom is won; (...) The individual who has not risked his life may well be recognized as a person, but he has not attained to the truth of this recognition as an independent selfconsciousness. Similarly, just as each stakes his own life, so each must seek the other's death, for it values the other no more than itself.”²⁹⁸

Judith Butler interprets this paragraph as a logic of desire that leads to the destruction of the body: “Whereas destructive desire in its first appearance sought to internalize otherness into a self-sufficient body, this second appearance of destructive desire endeavors to overcome bodily life altogether, i.e., to become an abstract identity without corporeal needs.”²⁹⁹ According to her, this is a continuation of Hegel's “erotic” by other means. In this paragraph, corporeal existence is seen as the ultimate limit to freedom. Now, were this desire to be entirely satisfied and taken to its extreme point, there would be no dialectic left, and the struggle for recognition would result in utter annihilation. But Hegel's

²⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, §186, p. 113.

²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, §187, pp. 113-114.

²⁹⁹ Judith Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 52.

point is of course to prove that there is a mediation to be made here; and this mediation entails that destructive desire be curtailed; in other words, the winning self-consciousness must refrain from destroying its other.

The result of this most famous of dialectics, as has been widely stated, is that one self-consciousness wins, the other loses; one comes therefore to dominate the other, and the result is a pattern of interaction in which two figures emerge: “one is the independent consciousness whose essential nature is to be for itself, the other is the dependent consciousness whose essential nature is simply to live or to be for another. The former is lord, the other is bondsman.”³⁰⁰ Butler does an excellent job of analyzing how the fact that the desire to kill the other is kept in check does not necessarily entail its full elimination. Indeed, the bondsman is still alive, but *living a particular type of death*: “The Other must now live its own death. Rather than become an indeterminate nothingness through death, the Other must now prove its essential nothingness in life.”³⁰¹ The bondsman is subdued and, as such, is transformed in a “lifeless” object which is there only to fulfill his master’s desires. Butler reads this dialectic as a dialectic of disembodiment. The lord now adheres to the fullest extent to the universal. Freedom does not, in itself, require bodily experience for its exercise: “For the lord, bodily life must be taken care of, but just as well by an Other, for the body is not part of his own project of identity. The lord’s identity is essentially beyond the body.”³⁰²

The evolution of the dialectic has also been widely commented upon. The lord comes to provide for his needs through the mediation of the bondsman. The lord’s relation with things in the world becomes a relation of pure enjoyment.³⁰³ As for the bondsman, he *works* on it, and consequently he transforms it. Therefore, he uses his body as an instrument, i.e., an expressive medium through which he transforms the world. We can see how Marx’s analyses of labor and alienation are somewhat foreshadowed here. The lord and the bondsman consequently come to negate things in a radically different way: one by consumption, the other by labor. And it is precisely in virtue of this second type of negation that the bondsman recovers his freedom. By working, he finds a creative mean to express his selfhood: “Through work, however, the bondsman becomes conscious of what he

³⁰⁰ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §189, p. 115.

³⁰¹ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 52.

³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 53.

³⁰³ Hegel, *Phenomenology*, §190, p. 116.

truly is.”³⁰⁴ And a few lines below, towards the end of the section: “in fashioning the thing, he becomes aware that being-for-self belongs to him, that he himself exists essentially and actually in his own right. (...) Through this rediscovery of himself by himself, the bondsman realizes that it is precisely in his work wherein he seemed to have only an alienated existence that he acquires a mind of his own.”³⁰⁵ Work is therefore seen as an essential means for shaping our identity.

Butler claims that both lord and bondsman resist the synthesis proper to human beings, that of embodied freedom, and that only the dissolution of this dialectic allows for a fully human life: “The lord and the bondsman turn against life in different ways, but both resist the synthesis of corporeality and freedom, a synthesis that alone is constitutive of human life; the lord lives in dread of his body, while the bondsman lives in dread of freedom. The dissolution of their antagonism paves the way for an embodied pursuit of freedom, a desire to live in the fullest sense.”³⁰⁶

Evidently, this section and the master-slave dialectic aren’t but a moment in Hegel’s *Phenomenology*; also, this figure of spirit will readily be superseded by the figure of stoicism, whereby the slaves, through work and the fear of death come to recognize the universal. I will not follow the rest of the *Phenomenology* up until Absolute Knowing; we have already seen how the movement is circular and each figure constantly sends us back to the teleological goal of the Absolute through purpose rationality. My aim, in articulating the logic of desire as Hegel saw it, was merely to explain and emphasize this most famous of all the figures of conflict in the history of philosophy. Ultimately, what is the lesson to be learned from this short, condensed and often disputed section of the *Phenomenology*? For Marx, Kojève and many in the Marxist-Hegelian tradition, this dialectic has served as some sort of allegory to describe the actual oppression of individuals under capitalist social organization. Moreover, as Charles Taylor points out, it seemed to entail that “servitude prepares the ultimate liberation of the slaves, and indeed general liberation”.³⁰⁷ The idea that the slave becomes a universal consciousness through his work would later be taken up in a slightly altered manner by Georg Luckács who considered the Proletariat as the truly universal class, the one whose

³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, §195, p. 118.

³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, §196, pp. 118-119.

³⁰⁶ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 55.

³⁰⁷ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, pp. 154-155.

interests are really identified with universal interests and thus tends to identify itself with universal consciousness.³⁰⁸

So there is a tendency to emphasize this allegoric conflict, to conflate it with a Marxist theory of history, and to make of dialectical materialism the ultimate key to understand social conflict and its eventual pacification in the end of history identified with the socialist society. Or, in a more secular and post-metaphysical version, to assert the same vision and goals without, however, resorting to a deterministic stance; instead choosing to reconstruct the Hegelian master-slave dialectic in purely anthropologic and political terms. Kojève seems to stand halfway between these two possibilities.

A source of contention seems to be the diagnosis that should be attributed to the struggle for recognition (in this particular version) in social-theoretical terms. I mean, is the struggle absolutely inevitable, and is its outcome necessarily the enslavement of one of the parties? Does intersubjectivity necessarily lead to domination, and does this domination need to be broken by violent means? Or is there after all a possibility for reconciliation through recognition? Ultimately, is this a monological account, or not?

These are too many questions at a time, and I do not want to bite off more than I can chew, even though, with Hegel, one ultimately always runs that risk. Habermas and Honneth do see in Hegel a possibility for reconciliation through recognition, but only by recovering, completing and reactualizing his early Jena lectures. Kojève and Sartre seem to read Hegel with a dualist bias, through an ontology of negation and finitude. In their reading, the possibility of reconciliation seems to be precluded, and conflict seems to be ineluctable. For Kojève thus, the identification of recognition with the struggle between master and slave seems to be final. Many Hegel scholars, and Williams most of all, refuse this account and choose to see in this particular dialectic only one of the possible shapes of recognition, and strive to show that the opposition is not final. He also attempts to show that the intersubjective paradigm is implicit in Hegel's account throughout his whole work. Others choose to read the *Phenomenology* as a grand narrative of the logic of desire or as a kind of "interpretive dialectic", that is, a particular kind

³⁰⁸ See Georg Luckács, "Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat" in *History and Class Consciousness. Studies in Marxist Dialectics*, translated by Rodney Livingstone (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1968), especially the section "The standpoint of the proletariat", pp. 149-159.

of hermeneutics – in the first case we have Butler’s reading, in the second, Taylor’s. Some choose to see in Hegel the negation of otherness and the metaphysical absurdity of the closed system – and this accounts for Levinas, the positivists, and so many others – while others, like Taylor, see in Absolute Knowing the mere recapitulation of the whole content of the *Phenomenology*, which is then nothing more than a peculiar form of exposition. Ricœur, for his part, will see many things in the *Phenomenology* (still Hegel’s book that played a more important role for him) but he will definitely reject the system and its philosophy of history.

As for me, to sum up my position, I agree with Williams that the master-slave dialectic is only a particular form of the struggle for recognition, but I concur with Habermas and Honneth when they say that from the *Phenomenology* onwards Hegel’s philosophy is more monological than anything else, and so that the paradigm of interaction and relationship-formation through work, more suitable in recognition-theoretical terms adapted to our own day and age, must be found in the early lectures. Simultaneously, even though I see in the *Phenomenology* one of the best, most ambitious and strikingly full of brilliant intuitions philosophy books ever written, I too must reject the standpoint of the Absolute and see, like Ricœur sees in it, an unfounded ontological claim. Likewise, I too find in Kojève/Sartre’s reading a very narrow and one-sided interpretation of Hegel. However, their reading of the master-slave dialectic, coupled with the Marxist lens, still has the merit of providing us with a very clear conflict model for political and social philosophy, one that will help explain the appearance of social conflicts and society’s evolution through the struggle for emancipation. As such, even if it misconstrues Hegel, that reading deserves some credit, not really by its philological accuracy, but more for its descriptive and even normative power. I will come back to this reading in section 1.3.5 below, when briefly mentioning the French reception of Hegel, in order to pave the way for Ricœur’s interpretation of Hegel. But let me first mention in a very cursory manner both Hegel’s mature philosophy, and his own overarching definition of dialectic.

1.3.3 – Hegel’s mature philosophy: freedom and recognition in the *Philosophy of Right*

The *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*³⁰⁹ is a book originally published in 1820, and which contains a very important part of Hegel’s political philosophy, as well as his very influential, and very often criticized, theory of the state. It is one of the best expressions of his mature philosophy and indeed corresponds to the extended version of what he called his philosophy of spirit, of which a first version had appeared in 1817 in the first edition of the *Encyclopedia*. In it what we find is both a historical and a normative account of freedom, of its different conceptions and possibilities, and also of the way in which real freedom can be instantiated through institutions such as law and the state. It so happens that Hegel was living in the Prussian state and that his “end of history” thesis seemed suitable for conservative political appropriation. This, and other misreadings such as Popper’s contributed to make of Hegel the quintessential backward thinker, and his philosophy was sometimes even relegated to the category of totalitarianism. This is, I think, an essentially wrong picture.

In France, one of the few – or at least one of the first – to make a serious attempt to read the *Philosophy of Right* not like an apology of the Prussian state, but in a systematic, normative manner, was Eric Weil in his doctoral thesis, entitled *Hegel et l’État*,³¹⁰ originally published in 1950. Indeed, Weil defines his own attempt as “a critique of the traditional critique according to which Hegel would be the supporter of the Prussian state and the prophet of what is usually called statism”.³¹¹ Weil puts forward an image of the Hegelian *Philosophy of Right* as a much more dynamic evolution. While Weil believes in the “reconciliation of man with himself in the concrete universality of reasonable organization”³¹², he does not believe that this was provided in the state of Hegel’s time, nor does he think Hegel believed in it either. The Hegelian state is thus for him a perishable state: “The Hegelian state dies: and the proof thereof resides in the fact that the Hegelian philosophy of the state was possible. Because that form depleted itself,

³⁰⁹ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, translated by T. M. Knox and revised and edited by Stephen Houlgate (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2008).

³¹⁰ Eric Weil, *Hegel et l’État* (Paris: Vrin, 1985).

³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 7.

³¹² *Ibid.*, p. 101 [My translation]

because it penetrated reality, it must give way to something else, and spirit, in its unconscious and subterranean work, tends towards a new *Wirklichkeit*.”³¹³ Weil thus did an important job of freeing up at least a partial plausibility for the Hegelian philosophy of right in the French context, and this at a time when the French intellectual public was almost totally dismissive towards this part of Hegelianism.

In the English-speaking world this recovery was slower. It is taking place, perhaps, in our own day. I will give a rapid overview of its main argument, specifically from the angle of freedom and recognition, because of the recovery of Hegelian practical philosophy I have been alluding to. The Preface to the *Philosophy of Right* provides us with some of Hegel’s most famous and also polemical assertions, such as “*What is rational is actual and what is actual is rational*”³¹⁴ and the metaphoric passage which expresses philosophy’s retrospective character: “The owl of Minerva begins its flight only with the falling of dusk”.³¹⁵ These were, of course, the passages that led to the accusation of quietism, conservatism. But the fact that what is identified with rationality is *actuality*, *Wirklichkeit*, and not empirical reality as such, suffices perhaps to prove that matters are far more complicated.

Be that as it may, the course of history is for Hegel a rational process of free self-determination. And it is free determination by spirit, of course, one which must be grasped philosophically by the concept (or the notion), as he makes clear in the *Logic*. What the *Philosophy of Right* discloses is what Hegel calls the instantiation of objective spirit, that is, the institutions that are necessary for this march of spirit towards freedom. In developing this intuition, Hegel is somewhat revolutionary in his own context. He clearly postulates a unification between subject and object, in what is a radical refutation of Descartes and Kant; and in the domain of “objective spirit” this means, for him, that in order to really become actual, human freedom must go beyond its merely subjective moment and, as it were, objectify itself in structures like civil society, the state, laws, rights and institutions. This is, I think, an enormously important intuition that must be taken into account, regardless of what we think of other aspects of Hegelianism.

³¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 103 [My translation].

³¹⁴ Hegel, *Outlines of the Philosophy of Right*, p. 14.

³¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

Allow me to concentrate very briefly on the several notions of right emphasized by Hegel. The first moment of freedom is that of subjective freedom, or what he incisively calls “negative freedom”. In §5 he describes it as “pure indeterminacy”, “pure thought of oneself”, “abstraction from every determination” and “freedom as the understanding conceives it”.³¹⁶ Hegel means by all these expressions that this is individual freedom conceived as freedom from external impediments, but conceived in such a, let us say, egoistic and solipsistic way that it eventually leads to destruction: “it takes shape in religion and politics alike as the fanaticism of destruction (of the whole subsisting social order), as the elimination of individuals who are objects of suspicion to a given social order, and as the annihilation of any organization which tries to rise anew from the ruins.”³¹⁷ This type of freedom is for Hegel grounded in abstractness, in my ability to negate every determination that forms me.

The second type of freedom, explained in §6, is the beginning of the process of determination. It is what we would call freedom of choice, the “positing of a determinacy as a content and object”³¹⁸ it is, a Hegel explicates in the addition, a “willing of *something*”. What is, however, this *something*? It might be an inclination, a desire, and so on. Determination is needed. “Only by resolving can a human being step into actuality”, says Hegel in §13.³¹⁹ However, since these are natural inclinations, he concludes in §15 that this freedom is mere arbitrariness (*Willkür*) or, as he puts it, “*contingency manifesting itself as will*”.³²⁰

Nonetheless, Hegel is also not content with this type of freedom because contingency is still far from rational freedom; it is not, as such, self-determination. The next step of the dialectic is to affirm that freedom needs to reflect upon itself and become an object for itself; moreover, in order for the will to be free, it needs to want freedom; or, as Hegel phrases it: “The abstract concept of the Idea of the will is in general *the free will which wills the free will*.”³²¹ But in order for free will to become free, it must objectify itself. And its object will be given by the several different rights that it will come to strive for.

³¹⁶ *Ibid.*, §5, pp. 28-29.

³¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

³¹⁸ *Ibid.*, §6, p. 30.

³¹⁹ *Ibid.*, §13, p. 37.

³²⁰ *Ibid.*, §15, p. 37.

³²¹ *Ibid.*, §27, p. 46.

Thus Hegel starts to speak about different rights. In his own vocabulary, morality, ethical life, and even world history count as “rights”. Hegel then dedicates a whole section to “abstract right” in its many forms, like property, contract, the many types of wrongdoing, and so on. In the section on morality he depicts the standpoint of what he takes to be Kant’s empty formalism. However, it is only when he reaches the section on ethical life that he tackles “the concept of freedom developed into the existing world”.³²² This is where we find his depiction of the multiple relationships of mutual interdependence in recognition in spheres like the family or civil society. It is also in this section that we find the famous analyzes of the *rabble of paupers* (*Die Arme Pöbel*), characterized by “an inner indignation against the rich, against society, against the government” and that breeds evil due to a condition of “lacking sufficient honour to secure subsistence by its own labour and yet at the same time of claiming the right to receive subsistence”.³²³ This depiction ends with Hegel claiming that “Against nature a human being can claim no right, but once society is established, poverty immediately takes the form of a wrong done to one class by another”,³²⁴ an assertion which clearly anticipates Marx and that certainly left on him a lasting impression.

As is well known, Hegel’s book ends up with a depiction of the state, defined as the “spirit of a people, both the law *permeating all relationships within the state* and also at the same time the custom and consciousness of its citizens”,³²⁵ that is, it is allegedly an embodiment of the people. The remainder of the book describes the many properties of this state, and has some questionable remarks about the duties of citizens towards it. But regardless of these, let us say, contingent affirmations about the nature of the state and the somewhat monological character that they entail, what deserves to be salvaged is the depiction of the stage of “true freedom”, or the objective side of it, that is “the right to freedom”.

In §29 Hegel asserts that “Right is any existence at all which is the *existence of the free will*”,³²⁶ which seems to entail that without rights, freedom

³²² *Ibid.*, §142, p. 154.

³²³ *Ibid.*, §244, p. 221.

³²⁴ *Ibid.*

³²⁵ *Ibid.*, §274, p. 263.

³²⁶ *Ibid.*, §29, p. 46.

remains utterly abstract. In his introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, Stephen Houlgate is very clear about the importance of this connection between right and freedom: “It should be clear why Hegel introduces this idea of right at this point in his account of freedom: for the free will that has its own freedom as its object, and that *must* will and affirm its freedom if it is to be truly free, necessarily regards its freedom as its *right*.”³²⁷ This means that the notion of right stems from freedom and its exercise but that, in turn, it is right that guarantees and safeguards objective freedom. Freedom thus originates the creation, protection and promotion of rights, and, most of all, of the right to freedom. Moreover, it entails and demands recognition; recognition of rights, surely, but also recognition of the right to one’s freedom. As Houlgate puts it: “right is nothing but freedom that requires recognition”.³²⁸

Now, all this analysis points to the social and institutional prerequisites for the actual exercise of freedom. Right is concerned with freedom. Freedom entails social realization. And this, in turn, is embedded in a certain *Sittlichkeit* and in a plurality of meaningful institutions without the existence of which the most significant possibility of freedom would be curtailed. This standpoint leads to what Pippin calls “institutional rationality”, and to which he gives a meaningful reactualization.³²⁹ Simultaneously, it calls for the actual instantiation of recognition and rights and thus points towards an intrinsic connection between rights and recognition. And it is the exploration of this connection that Honneth undertakes in his latest and very important book, *Das Recht der Freiheit*.³³⁰ I will briefly come back to analyze this last book, and Honneth’s recovery of Hegel to which I feel so close, in the first chapter of part two. But for now, and for the purposes of the fleshing out of the definition of conflict and dialectic at stake in Hegel, I need to directly tackle his *Logic*. In so doing, we will increase the level of abstraction, but only in order to later come back down to earth and see exactly what is there in Hegel to be saved and recovered after all.

³²⁷ Stephen Houlgate, Introduction to the *Philosophy of Right*, p. xxiii.

³²⁸ *Ibid.*

³²⁹ Robert Pippin, *Hegel’s Practical Philosophy*, chapter 9, “Institutional Rationality”, pp. 239-272.

³³⁰ The English translation of this book – Axel Honneth, *Freedom’s Right: The Social Foundations of Democratic Life* (Cambridge: Polity, 2014) – was published at the moment when this thesis was being finished and I did not have the time to use it. As such, whenever I mention or quote from this book, I am using the German version: Axel Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit. Grundriss einer demokratischen Sittlichkeit* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 2011).

1.3.4 – The definition of dialectic

Up until now, we have seen Hegel's dialectical method implicitly at work in both the Jena's early writings, the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and the *Philosophy of Right*, mainly because of issues pertaining to the realm of human praxis: agency, intersubjectivity, recognition and freedom. However, if we want to tackle the main issue of dialectics and negativity, in order to eventually find in it the notion of creative or productive conflict, we have to briefly take into account Hegel's *Logic*. The *Logic* is one of the most brilliant and complex works in the history of philosophy and I certainly cannot do it justice here, but I will try to grasp the definition of dialectics that is here relevant for my own purposes.

Hegel's *Logic* had two versions. The most extensive version is the *Science of Logic*³³¹, published in the period between 1812 and 1816, and which was revised for a second edition in 1832. In the meantime, Hegel published a more condensed version of his logic, as the first part of his *Encyclopedia*³³², which is, by Hegel's own account, the accomplished form of his system. This condensed version was also revised, and republished in a different form in 1827, and yet another, third form, in 1830. The recent Cambridge translations I am using take into account the revisions of the definitive versions of both of these writings. Charles Taylor contends that the *Logic* is "the only real candidate for the role of strict dialectical proof", because "If the real exists and has the structure it has by conceptual necessity, then the task of the *Logic* is to show this conceptual structure by pure conceptual argument."³³³ And this is indeed the enormous task that Hegel would undertake.

Unlike Marx, whose references to his dialectical method are scarce and meant for popular divulgation, Hegel actually strives to provide his dialectical method a conceptual consistence, if not always clarity. The most direct and succinct account he provided for it can be found in the *Encyclopedia* and because of that, I will take that definition as my starting point and guiding thread. In the second version of the *Encyclopedia*, published in 1827, Hegel indeed adds an

³³¹ Hegel, *The Science of Logic*, edited and translated by George di Giovanni (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³² Hegel, *Encyclopedia of the Philosophical Sciences in Basic Outline. Part I: Science of Logic*, translated and edited by Klaus Brinkmann and Daniel O. Dahlstrom (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010).

³³³ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 225.

explanation of his dialectical method in §§79-83, and which is meant to provide an overview of the structure of the book.³³⁴

As I hinted at before, after the publication of the *Phenomenology*, Hegel wanted to complement it with a logic, a philosophy of nature, and a philosophy of spirit, which would be his complete philosophical system. The *Science of Logic* was published with that goal in mind. However, shortly afterwards, Hegel decided that it would be better to publish a more concise demonstration of the system, and thus the *Encyclopedia* was born. This was, as it were, a condensed version of the whole system. It might seem difficult to fit the Absolute in a few hundred pages, and yet, this was Hegel's attempt. It should be kept in mind that the book was meant to be introductory, a sort of manual for his students in Heidelberg.

I will not follow in its entirety – that would be a book-size comment – the dialectic of categories of reality of the *Encyclopedia*. I will restrict myself to the main driving force of the movement of these thought-determinations. I have described earlier how it ends with the standpoint of Absolute Knowing and we shall see for what reasons the category of the Absolute will be rejected by most readers of Hegel, and sometimes transformed and recovered by others, such as Eric Weil and Jean Hyppolite. Suffice it to say that as we have already seen in the *Philosophy of Right*, there is an identification between rationality and actuality, *Wirklichkeit*, and that this connection is kept tight by spirit, *Geist*, and its inner development. As for the fundamental operations guiding the movement, they will be given by the logic of the real itself. So let us see how Hegel defines the fundamental dialectical movement underlying this logic.

In §79 Hegel asserts that the logical domain has three sides, namely its abstract side (that of the understanding), its dialectical, or “negatively rational” side and the speculative, or “positively rational” side.³³⁵ He further clarifies that these are not “parts of logic” but “moments of every properly logical content”, that is, every concept of anything that is true in general. In §80 we find the depiction of the understanding as a “limited abstraction”, i.e., an art of limitation. In the addition, Hegel quotes Goethe and the “need to limit oneself”, in order to achieve something great (by avoiding dispersion, etc.). These concrete, limited

³³⁴ This section is called the “More Precise Conception and Division of the Logic”, pp. 125-133.

³³⁵ Hegel, *Encyclopedia*, §79, p. 125.

undertakings (such as the pursuing of a specific profession) are tasks for the understanding.

Then, in §81, comes the fundamental definition of dialectic. Hegel states that “the dialectical moment is the self-sublation of such finite determinations by themselves and their transition into their opposites”.³³⁶ As such, the self-sublation (*Aufhebung*), indicates that this is the essential moment of negativity at work. In the subsequent development and explanation of this paragraph, Hegel specifies the difference of his own take on this method, and the way in which philosophical tradition considered it. Claiming that he wants to go beyond the “subjective seesaw system of back-and-forth rationalizing where the basic content is missing” he therefore defines it as follows:

In its distinctive determinateness, the dialectic is far more the proper, true nature of the determinations of the understanding, of things, and of the finite in general. Reflexion is at first a process of going beyond the isolated determinacy, i.e. a relating of it, whereby it is brought into a relationship, despite its being maintained in its isolated validity. The dialectic is, by contrast, this *immanent* process of going beyond [such determinacy] wherein the one-sided and limited character of the determinations of the understanding presents itself as what it is, namely as their negation. Everything finite is this, the sublation of itself. Thus, the dialectical moment constitutes the moving soul of the scientific progression and is the principle through which alone *an immanent connection and necessity* enters into the content of science, just as in general the true, as opposed to an external, elevation above the finite resides in this principle.³³⁷

We can see, in Hegel’s definition, how for him the finite determinations of the understanding are constitutively meant to be superseded. Isolated elements must be grasped against the backdrop of their relation and dialectic will be the immanent development of such a connection, movement and transformation.

In the addition, Hegel characterizes this movement in very strong and clear terms. He asserts that “recognizing the dialectical dimension is of the highest importance” and that dialectic “is in general the principle of all movement, all life, and all actual activity”; as a consequence, it must be also “the soul of any truly

³³⁶ *Ibid.* §81, p. 128.

³³⁷ *Ibid.*, §81, pp. 128-129.

scientific knowing”.³³⁸ He provides examples of this. Life and death are not, as such, two different things. Rather, life carries within itself the germ of death, and death is seen as a natural development of life. In the same way, Hegel argues, the finite supersedes itself in the infinite, and this something that science (i.e., the philosophical concept) must grasp. He strongly emphasizes that there is an objective component to this logic, that it is *not* sophistry. For him, sophistry is a technique that mobilizes isolated contents “depending on the individual’s respective interests and particular situation”. We could say, in more contemporary terms, that the Hegelian dialectic is not perspectivistic. He definitely wants to go beyond subjective principles, subjective freedom, and the one-sided determinations of the understanding. In his own words, dialectic “aims precisely at contemplating things as they are in and for themselves”.³³⁹ Finally, he reminds us that dialectics is an ancient technique in philosophy, recalling Plato and Socrates, reading in them a display of a technique of negation, ultimately directed at showing the “finitude of all fixed determinations of the understanding in general”.³⁴⁰ Obviously, he is projecting his own philosophy in Plato and Socrates; but the real differences between his philosophy and that of “divisive understanding” become apparent when he addresses Kant.

In the same addition to §81, Hegel mentions Kant’s antinomies. He asserts that even though the understanding tends to resist dialectic, this movement cannot be considered as a mere presence in philosophical (subjective) consciousness. It is rather much more than that. So what in Kant (and Ricœur, ultimately) has the status of a temptation – that is, going beyond the bounds of experience – attains for Hegel an objective status. Allow me to note, in passing, that the logic of illusion is here inverted. For Kant, what is illusory is the dialectic of contrary affirmations and its attempt to produce absolute objects. For Hegel, in contrast, what is illusory is the subject’s attempt to escape dialectic and thus refuse to grasp the whole, whose movement is everywhere identified. Hegel is very assertive in this point:

³³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

³³⁹ *Ibid.*

³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

Instead, what is in play here is already found in all other forms of consciousness and is found universally in experience. Everything that surrounds us can be viewed as an example of the dialectic. We know that all finite things, instead of being something fixed and ultimate, are really changeable and perishable, and this is nothing but the dialectic of the finite. By virtue of this dialectic, the same thing (as in itself the other of itself) is driven beyond what it immediately is and turns over into its opposite.³⁴¹

With this passage, the model of dialectics and negativity through conflict attains its height, and can be compared to no other such model in philosophy, except perhaps Heraclitus's. Ultimately, for Hegel, let us not forget, *everything can be viewed as an example of the dialectic*. A few lines down, Hegel recalls that the same dialectic is at work in the natural and the spiritual world "as, for instance, in the movement of the celestial bodies", and the "physical elements" as well, and he finds a "proof" thereof in the meteorological process. As for the ethical domain, Hegel sees in the interaction of extremes further evidence of dialectic as a logic of reality. He cites the interaction between extreme justice and extreme injustice, the similarities between anarchy and despotism, and also feelings like pain and joy.

In the second addition to this paragraph though, he makes a general observation that is of the utmost importance for our assessment of his dialectical method. He asserts that philosophy "does not rest with the merely negative result of the dialectical as is the case with skepticism" because the latter clings to dialectic's negation abstract result. But as we know, Hegel's dialectics is *determinate* negation. So Hegel adds:

Because the dialectic has the negative as a result, the negative is equally positive, precisely as a result, for it contains within itself that from which it results, containing the latter as something it has sublated, and is not without what it has sublated. This, however, is the fundamental determination of the third form of the logical, namely of the *speculative* or positively rational.³⁴²

Now this is, in fact, Hegel's clearer definition of *Aufhebung*. The new development contains in itself what has been superseded; in the new development,

³⁴¹ *Ibid.*

³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 131.

something of the old reality remains, but it remains in a negated manner, assuming a new form.

And indeed, in §82, this new outcome is expressed in conceptual terms, under the banner of the speculative: “The *speculative* or the *positively rational* grasps the unity of the determinations in their opposition, the *affirmative* that is contained in their dissolution and their passing over into something else.”³⁴³ In his explication of this conceptual moment, he in fact defines the whole of his philosophy, and the way in which this seemingly abstract logic is in fact a logic of the concrete, of the real:

The dialectic has a *positive* result, because it has a *determinate content* or because its result is in truth not an *empty, abstract nothing*, but instead the negation of *definite determinations* that are contained in the result precisely because it is not an *immediate nothing*, but a result instead. Therefore, although it is something thought, even abstract, the rational is at the same time something *concrete*, because it is not *simple, formal* unity, but a *unity of distinct determinations*.³⁴⁴

Hegel is thus claiming that what at first glimpse might seem only an ossified, dry and abstract system of logic is in fact the underlying structure of reality itself, of the whole. And nothing encapsulates and defines this whole and its dynamic movement as dialectic itself. This is, in sum, Hegel’s definition of dialectic, the most ambitious, encompassing – and some would argue, a bit delusional – of any such attempt in philosophy.

The “Greater Logic”, i.e., the *Science of Logic* would of course be an even more complex attempt to carry this effort through. I will not delve in its intricate details because, the way I see it, it does not radically alter the definition of dialectic we have seen. The same process of evolution through contradiction is blatant. And thus we get to the notion of “productive conflict” I wanted to grasp. Hegel proceeds, in each step, by showing that there are categorial contradictions and that the only way to solve them is to move to the next step of the stage of development, which thus, becomes necessary. As Charles Taylor argues, “the contradiction in Hegel’s Logic comes from the fact that certain concepts are both

³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

³⁴⁴ *Ibid.*

indispensable *and* incoherent: that is, as concepts of reality they are in conflict with their own criterial properties; and yet being indispensable they must be instantiated. This is the key to Hegel's enterprise".³⁴⁵ Because of this incoherence, concepts will be destroyed, and when destroyed, they will be maintained in their negated form at the higher stage. The *Logic* is thus the chain of these necessarily connected concepts.

As we know, for Hegel, as far as we can tell, the outcome is not only positive and systematic, but necessary and absolute. Hegel's optimism and overambitious claims were often derided and object of refutation, first by Marx, then by many others. In our own day, some philosophers, and I want to mention Karin de Boer as one notorious example³⁴⁶, seek to criticize modernity through Hegel and by tempering his dialectical method with his tragic view. Ultimately, I think Ricœur has a similar project. At the end of this chapter, I will sum up the provisional conclusions regarding Hegel's thought and Ricœur's appreciation of it. But first I will set up the historical background for it, by making a small detour into the French reception of Hegel in the 20th century.

1.3.5 – The French reception of Hegel: Wahl, Kojève, Hyppolite, Weil

Unlike in Anglophone philosophy, where the "Hegelian renaissance" has been more vivid in the past two decades, Hegel had a strong reception in France in the 20th century, even if this reception was sometimes more critical than enthusiastic. In this section, which will be very condensed, I will mostly concentrate on the French reception of Hegel that preceded Ricœur or influenced the early Ricœur (or that we could prove was known by Ricœur, who sometimes adhered, other times vehemently contested those readings), so that I can prepare the next section.³⁴⁷ It would be entirely impossible to give an accurate account here of the more recent French discussion of Hegel, which includes Lacan,

³⁴⁵ Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, p. 229.

³⁴⁶ Karin de Boer, *On Hegel. The Sway of the Negative* (Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2010).

³⁴⁷ In this section I am especially indebted to Judith Butler and to Ching-Kai Shen, who in his PhD thesis has written what is probably the most serious and complete attempt to fully analyze and describe Ricœur's reception of Hegel and his complicated relation towards Hegelian philosophy. See Ching-Kai Shen, *L'esprit hégélien chez Paul Ricœur. Une interprétation anthropologique de la pensée hégélienne*, doctoral thesis presented to the Institut Supérieur de Philosophie de l'Université Catholique de Louvain (Louvain-la-Neuve: June 2010).

Levinas or Deleuze. I will take Judith Butler as one of my guides in this cursory historical reminder. I will also only mention Sartre and Merleau-Ponty in passing, because their philosophies are too well known. For the purposes of this chapter, the reception as it took place with Kojève, Hyppolite and Weil was more important (with Kojève because it is his reading that will influence all the others, and with Hyppolite and Weil because it was through the critiques of their work that Ricœur shaped his own position).

Ultimately, however, the two Hegelians with whom Ricœur shared most affinities in his early years were Weil and Jean Wahl. Jean Wahl was probably the author of the most influential early book on Hegel in this context. His *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel*³⁴⁸ offers a very peculiar reading of Hegel, which mixes Hegel's dialectics with Kierkegaard's existentialism. From the standpoint of the reception of Hegel in France, this was yet another influential mix, preparing in some way Sartre's own existentialism. The fact that his book was published even before the 1930s made him a figure almost as influential as Kojève – even though certainly less flamboyant – because in the context of, let us say, anti-academic and anti-idealist philosophy, he was indeed probably the first to strongly recover Hegel's and Kierkegaard's philosophy in France. In his existential reading of Hegel he strongly emphasizes, like Kojève, the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, but unlike him, he also highlights the “unhappy consciousness” and its bad infinity, instead of the master-slave dialectic. It should be noted that this topic of the unhappy consciousness will be recurrent in Ricœur, and even in *The Course of Recognition* he eventually accuses the logic of the struggle of recognition of being a logic of bad infinity. But perhaps the most important trait that Ricœur finds in Wahl and that will surely be incorporated in his philosophy is Wahl's particular grasp of dialectics.

Ching-Kai Shen insightfully calls our attention to this fact. In 1953 Wahl publishes his *Traité de Métaphysique*.³⁴⁹ Ricœur then publishes a review of it in 1957 in *Esprit*, a text later included in *Lectures 2*.³⁵⁰ In this review, Ricœur chooses to accentuate a particular trait of Wahl's understanding of metaphysics. He comments that for Jean Wahl “true dialectics is the one that remains

³⁴⁸ Jean Wahl, *Le malheur de la conscience dans la philosophie de Hegel* (Paris: P.U.F., 1951), for the most accessible version.

³⁴⁹ Jean Wahl, *Traité de Métaphysique* (Paris: Payot, 1953).

³⁵⁰ Ricœur, “Le ‘Traité de Métaphysique’ de Jean Wahl”, in *Lectures 2*, pp. 79-91.

fragmentary, in crumbs (Kierkegaard); its end is ecstasis and silence”.³⁵¹ Allow me to recall that Kierkegaard adopted a very polemic stance against Hegelian dialectics and its pretention to put itself in the standpoint of the Absolute and the universal. One of his most famous essays is precisely the *Philosophical Fragments* (or, translated literally, *Philosophical Crumbs*, “miettes philosophiques” in French). As a result, Wahl’s reading of Hegel is heavily paradoxical. But then again, this paradox, and the notion of paradox itself was to become essential in French existentialism, coupled with that of mystery, especially for Ricœur and Gabriel Marcel (and also through the influence of Karl Jaspers). I will leave more detailed analyzes of these notions and of this phase of Ricœur’s philosophy for part three of this thesis. However, the fact is that Ricœur was influenced by both Wahl’s existential reading, and his emphasis on, let us say with a certain reservation, “Kierkegaardian dialectics”. Curiously enough, if the topic of “existence” can be allocated to a specific phase of Ricœur’s thought, in tune with the spirit of his time, that is, the France of the 1940s and 1950s, and if he would later more or less drop that terminology and replace it with other, connected notions, the notion of “fragmented dialectics” will indeed stick with him, and his method, up until the end. This notion will be recovered and deepened by the conflict of interpretations, in strictly methodological terms.

Nevertheless, Wahl’s own insistence in the “unhappy consciousness” was far less influential than the many books trying to explore Hegelian philosophy as a logic of desire. These were mainly the interpretations that started gaining currency in the 1930s and 1940s but that ultimately had many echoes in later philosophers. Judith Butler does a wonderful job of retracing this history. Butler’s own standpoint in 1987 was somewhat Hegelian, even if in later works she has taken different directions. In *Subjects of Desire* she reconstructs the reception of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* in France as a history of desire that she claims fascinated its readers, even if they wanted to expose it: “The subject of desire remains a compelling fiction even for those who claim to have definitively exposed his charades.”³⁵² Indeed, with the dawn of Postmodernism, it seems as if Hegel was

³⁵¹ “la vraie dialectique est celle qui reste dans le fragmentaire, dans les miettes (Kierkegaard) ; son terme est extase et silence”. I am quoting Shen, *L’esprit hégélien chez Paul Ricœur*, p. 82, who in turn is quoting Ricœur’s review, p. 91. Finally, Ricœur is commenting on page 722 of Jean Wahl’s *Traité de Métaphysique*.

³⁵² Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. x.

more polemic than ever, as authors tried to escape him. As Michel Foucault puts it in *The Order of Discourse*: “our entire epoch, whether in logic or epistemology, whether in Marx or Nietzsche, is trying to escape from Hegel”.³⁵³ But why should this be, why should Hegel appear as someone the generation of Foucault wanted to escape from? Why not just ignore him, like Anglophone philosophy did for so long? The reasons for this reaction, which is a combination of repudiation and, as I have said for Ricœur, temptation, must be sought after in the influence Hegel exerted in the previous generations.

Now, the genesis of this influence can be traced back to the 1930s and can be seen as silently maturing during the World War II years, and as exploding in the post-war juncture and the two following decades. Indeed, in the beginning it was Kojève. Kojève was a Russian intellectual who had studied in Germany and who, like many others such as Eric Weil, eventually established himself in France. He delivered a series of introductory lectures to Hegel’s thought in Paris from 1933 to 1939. These lectures were widely influential and left a lasting impression (either direct or indirect) in Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Bataille, and many others. But in fact, this was no ordinary introduction to Hegel’s philosophy; instead it was a very peculiar, oriented reading. It was not an introduction to Hegel’s thought in general but a particular emphasis in the *Phenomenology of Spirit*, and most of all in the master-slave dialectic, taken as paradigmatic of Hegelian philosophy.

Furthermore, it was a reading that introduced Marxist and Heideggerian elements, providing a mix (Hegel-Marx-Heidegger) that was extremely popular in Continental Philosophy for a certain period of time, if, to that lot, we also add the Post-Nietzschean variants. Additionally, it was meant to be an anthropological, “post-historical”, political reading of Hegel emphasizing conflict and rejecting Hegelian mediations. As Judith Butler claims, by rejecting the premise of ontological harmony, Kojève is free to extend Hegel’s doctrine of negation.³⁵⁴ However, while doing it, he traced back, in his anthropological reading, Marx’s doctrine of class struggle to the Hegelian struggle for recognition, which in fact allowed him to see *all* the progress of human history as a dialectical struggle for recognition between masters and slaves. As such, he recovers what we could call

³⁵³ Michel Foucault, “The Order of Discourse” in *Untying the Text: A Post-Structuralist Reader*, edited by Robert Young (Boston: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1981) p. 74.

³⁵⁴ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 63.

Marx's social philosophy, and namely the theory of alienation of the early Marx, alongside a certain expressivist qualification of the Marxist writings (with which I tend to agree), but re-reads them through the Hegelian perspective of the struggle for recognition. Consequently, social change is reduced to a single, overarching motivation and even though it seems as if he strives to maintain the dynamics of human action, the truth is that he fails to see the plurality of motivations that can lead to struggle; furthermore, to reiterate, he also fails to capture the positive traits of the phenomena of recognition, other than its supersession in the slaves' struggle for liberation.

The lectures were later edited by Raymond Queneau and published under the title *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*;³⁵⁵ in them, we find a mixed genre. They are both a translation and in-depth commentary of the first chapters of the *Phenomenology*, and some theoretical claims that are revelatory of Kojève's own attempt at putting forward an original philosophy. Now, like many other interpreters of the *Phenomenology*, Kojève approaches it through the angle of desire.³⁵⁶ Commenting upon the difference between animal and human desire in the *Phenomenology*, he underscores how the desire of self-consciousness, the specifically human desire, is not only a desire of desire, but an agonistic desire: "To be human, man must act not for the sake of subjugating a thing, but for the sake of subjugating another Desire."³⁵⁷ That the specific human desire, in the description of Kojève, is not in itself a desire for recognition (in its generic, reciprocal sense) but qualified as a desire to *subjugate* (so, of unequal recognition) speaks volumes about his own interpretation of Hegelian philosophy. Kojève describes the struggle in extremely blunt terms:

A *Fight*, since each will want to subjugate the other, *all* the others, by a negating, destroying *action*. A life and *death* Fight because Desire that is directed toward a Desire directed toward a Desire *goes beyond* the biological given, so that Action carried out for the sake of this Desire is not limited by this given. In other words, Man will risk his biological *life* to satisfy his *nonbiological* Desire. And Hegel says that the being that is incapable of putting its life in danger in order to attain ends that are not immediately vital

³⁵⁵ Alexandre Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel. Lectures on the Phenomenology of Spirit*, assembled by Raymond Queneau, edited by Allan Bloom, translated by James H. Nichols Jr. (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1980).

³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 37 ff.

³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

– i.e. the being that cannot risk its life in a Fight for *Recognition*, in a fight for pure prestige – is not a truly *human* being.³⁵⁸

All emphases in this quotation are Kojève's. And the fact that Kojève chooses to speak about prestige rather than honor also accentuates the perverse character he sees in the struggle. Kojève's conclusion is laconic, but at the same time we can see in it a huge leap in his argument:

In fine, then, we can say this: Man was born and History began with the first Fight that ended in the appearance of a Master *and* a Slave. That is to say that Man – at his origin – is always either Master or Slave; and that true Man can exist only where there is a Master and a Slave. (If they are to be *human*, they must be at least *two* in number.) And universal history, the history of the interaction between men and of their interaction with Nature, is the history of the interaction between warlike Masters and working Slaves.³⁵⁹

This is, evidently, too narrow a reading of Hegel's philosophy of history. Kojève follows Hegel and his diagnosis of the "end of history". Accordingly, in good Hegelian fashion, he believes that history ceased with the Napoleonic wars and namely the battle of Jena, because this was the moment in which the condition of both master and slave were superseded. Therefore, for Kojève, he and his contemporaries already live in a post-historical time, in that the essential structures of social progress have been unveiled. So, for him, the Hegelian account can be rendered in anthropological terms, much like the early Marx depicted social relations in anthropological terms.

I believe this is a fundamentally wrong picture – but then again, doesn't everyone else? – for reasons already explained above, when analyzing Hannah Arendt's take on human action and the unpredictability of the future, in virtue of action's capacity to bring about something new in the world. Time and again, Post-Hegelians who have tried to declare the end of history have been proven wrong by reality, Francis Fukuyama having been only the latest failure.³⁶⁰ Kojève's reading is exaggerated in yet another account, namely, its claim that man

³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 41.

³⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 43.

³⁶⁰ See Francis Fukuyama, *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: The Free Press, 1992).

is a “Nothingness that nihilates”³⁶¹, that is, in his own words, a “project” that works by negating Being, that is, by changing the given. This could be read as only an emphasis on human agency. But in fact it is much more; it is an altered Heideggerian graft onto Hegelianism, resulting in the ontological claim that we really do identify ourselves with the power to negate. This overblown appraisal of negation in the characterization of the human condition of course paved the way for the Sartrean interpretation with which Ricœur – and me, let me note in passing – strongly disagrees. Moreover, as Butler rightly notes, Kojève’s depiction is individualistic. For him, “Recognition does not have the effect of assimilating the individual into a more inclusive community; following the tradition of classical liberalism, Kojève views recognition as a process in which individuals form communities, but these communities facilitate the development of individuality and not its transcendence.”³⁶² However, I do see in Kojève a strong and powerful model for grasping social reality: the emphasis on recognition, the anthropologic toning down of Hegel and the highlighting of the early Marx’s social philosophy open the way to a dynamics of human action possibly leading to social change, namely the emancipation of oppressed social groups. All this can be compared to the Frankfurt Critical Theory tradition, at least in its later stages. Ultimately, Kojève’s model is flawed because he had some of the right intuitions, but mainly the wrong conclusions. Nonetheless, in spite of its flaws, botched philosophy of history and insufficient social model, Kojève’s effort must be lauded for having put Hegelian philosophy, and namely the struggle for recognition, in a central position in contemporary social terms. In terms of *Wirkungsgeschichte*, this effort was fundamental in bringing back Hegel, and recognition, to contemporary social theory and philosophy. Moreover, his analysis of the *Phenomenology of Spirit* sparked an interest and a debate that was vital for French philosophy in the 20th Century. Indeed, many of the authors who chose to delve in Hegel were all, one way or another, responding to Kojève.

Let me now turn to Jean Hyppolite as someone who offered a different, but also influential, reading of the *Phenomenology* – Deleuze and Foucault were introduced to Hegel by him in *khâgne* and Derrida studied under him at the École Normale supérieure –, and also as a thinker which had a more direct contact with

³⁶¹ Kojève, *Introduction to the Reading of Hegel*, p. 48.

³⁶² Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 77.

Ricœur. Hyppolite was a profound commentator of Hegel, as well as the translator of the *Phenomenology* into French. His monumental explanation of the commentary of the text is available in English.³⁶³ Hyppolite shares with Kojève a somewhat anthropological reading of the *Phenomenology*; however, the main difference of his approach resided in his insistence on also using the *Logic*, and of trying to unveil the possible meaningful connections between these two major Hegel works. He acknowledged the difficulty of such a task: “The leading difficulty of Hegelianism is the relation of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic*. Today we would speak of anthropology and ontology. The one studies the properly human reflection, the other the absolute reflection that passes through man”³⁶⁴; but he considered it as being essential. Consequently, his interpretation and recovery of Hegel could be dubbed a logico-ontological one (albeit heavily influenced by the Hegelian phenomenological standpoint also). Accordingly, his two major books on Hegel, respectively *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit* and *Logic and Existence* can be seen as being intrinsically connected to one another, the later book further developing the earlier analysis of the *Phenomenology*. Furthermore, like Kojève and Sartre, he was basically an atheist interpreter of Hegel; as such, not only was he, like them, a left-Hegelian, but he also chose to stress negation – both in phenomenological and logical terms – as the key to Hegelian philosophy: “Hegel’s philosophy is a philosophy of negation and negativity. The Absolute is only by determining itself, that is, by limiting itself, by negating itself.”³⁶⁵ Consequently, the ontology he proposes is basically a materialist one.

There is also, apparently, an influence of Heidegger, insofar as our temporality towards death is emphasized; Butler recalls this feature: “Hyppolite extends the domain of negation, arguing that human subjects are negativity inasmuch as they are temporal beings comported toward death.”³⁶⁶ She further explains that while for Kojève our grasp of the absolute resides in human historical acts, in Hyppolite’s resolutely more speculative interpretation these acts are revealed as less than absolute by temporality. The Heideggerian tone is

³⁶³ Jean Hyppolite, *Genesis and Structure of Hegel’s Phenomenology of Spirit*, translated by Samuel Cherniak and John Heckman (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1974).

³⁶⁴ Jean Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, translated by Leonard Lawlor and Amit Sen (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1997), p. 189.

³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

³⁶⁶ Butler, *Subjects of Desire*, p. 81.

reinforced when Hyppolite affirms that man is “the House of the Universal, of the Logos of Being”.³⁶⁷ This last passage is an attestation to the fact that even though Hyppolite’s is an anthropologic and materialist reading, it still wants to place itself in the standpoint of the Absolute, of concept, of the universal, in Hegelian terms. In my very brief analysis, I want to focus on the significance of Hyppolite’s second book, *Logic and Existence*, because it triggered a response from Ricœur that allows us to see to what extent Ricœur’s reading of Hegel is really not logico-ontological.

Even if for Hyppolite, the Absolute is determined by negation, this does not mean that we can refrain from taking the viewpoint of the Absolute into account. As he explicitly states:

Experience and the Logos are not opposed. The discourse of experience and the discourse of being, the *a posteriori* and the *a priori*, correspond to one another and mutually require one another. There would be no possible experience without the presupposition of absolute knowledge, but the path of experience points ahead to absolute knowledge.³⁶⁸

The result is some sort of immanent logic. He goes so far as to affirm that Hegel’s logic is a “doctrine of complete immanence which Spinoza had not been able to realize.”³⁶⁹ The effort to develop an immanent logic has of course been hugely influential in the writings of the next generation of French philosophers, with its peak probably in Deleuze. In this logic of immanence, and in the correspondence between the standpoints of Hegelian logic and phenomenology, the translators of *Logic and Existence* see a huge influence in later French philosophy, and namely in the emphasis put on the notion of *difference*: “In short, *Logic and Existence* opened the way for the theme that would dominate French thought after Sartre’s *Being and Nothingness*; the concept of difference found in the philosophies of Deleuze, Derrida, and Foucault would not exist without the publication of *Logic and Existence*. Correspondence implies not only that the phenomenology and the logic mutually presuppose one another but also that there is a difference between them.”³⁷⁰ In short, (immanent) being, contradicts itself, doubles itself. This is of

³⁶⁷ Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, p. 187.

³⁶⁸ Hyppolite, *Logic and Existence*, p. 36.

³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

³⁷⁰ Lawlor and Sen, p. ix of the Preface to *Logic and Existence*.

course full of possibilities. And many French philosophers, from Levinas to Derrida, Deleuze, and even Ricœur, saw in this an occlusion of alterity.³⁷¹

Logic and Existence was published in 1953. In 1955 Ricœur published a review of it in *Esprit*. This review, called “Philosophie et Ontologie I. Retour à Hegel”³⁷² is heavily critical of Hyppolite’s take on the Absolute, and “Absolute Knowing”; this is, indeed, an important article for our understanding of Ricœur’s stance toward Hegel. The rejection of the Absolute that we find here is more or less from the same epoch but indeed precedes for a few months the article he writes about Pierre Thévenaz, which I already mentioned, and in which he defines Thévenaz – and by extension, himself – as a philosopher “without absolute”.³⁷³

From the outset of “Retour à Hegel”, Ricœur places his reflection under the banner of humanism. This article from 1955 – so, in the passage from the first to the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*, that is, from the phenomenological method to philosophical anthropology and hermeneutics – chooses to speak from the standpoint of a philosophical anthropology; and this anthropology, in turn, is equated with humanism.³⁷⁴ It is thus against this backdrop that Ricœur voices his protestation against an emphasis in ontology attained at the cost of negating humanism or rejecting the primacy of philosophical anthropology.³⁷⁵

Ricœur seems to conceive the possibility of returning to Hegel as being legitimate; but he questions precisely the choice of trying to do it from the standpoint of the *Logic*, rather than the *Phenomenology*. Ricœur’s main objection lies in the following assertion: if the figures of the *Phenomenology* correspond to human experience, even if it is an idealized version of it, we can still recognize

³⁷¹ The preface of the translators mentioned above is very helpful in tracing this narrative.

³⁷² Ricœur, “Philosophie et Ontologie I. Retour à Hegel”, in *Esprit* 23/8 (1955): 1378-1391. The article has been republished in *Lectures 2*. I am quoting from the original version.

³⁷³ If “Retour à Hegel” is from 1955, “Un philosophe protestant: Pierre Thévenaz” was, in fact, in its original version, a preface to Pierre Thévenaz, *L’homme et sa raison, I. Raison et conscience de soi* (Neuchâtel: La Baconnière, 1956), pp. 9-26. I ignore which of the two texts was written before, but the same main intuition of rejecting the standpoint of absolute knowledge is strongly put forward in both of them.

³⁷⁴ Ricœur, “Retour à Hegel”, p. 1378.

³⁷⁵ “Le retour à Hegel – plus précisément au Hegel de la *Logique* et non pas seulement à celui de la *Phénoménologie de l’Esprit* ou même à celui de la *Philosophie du droit* – est un signe parmi les autres de cette promotion de l’ontologie contre le primat de l’anthropologie; (...) Notre question sera de savoir si l’homme, sa subjectivité, son histoire objective, pourront être autre chose que *déchet* aux yeux des philosophes qui commencent par mettre entre parenthèses, par “suspendre” l’homme, l’*humain*, *trop humain*, comme se plaît à dire Hyppolite dans *Logique et Existence*.”, *Ibid.*, p. 1379.

ourselves in them. However, a *discourse* on the logical categories culminating in Absolute Knowing? That possibility seems for Ricœur untenable.

The logic is a dialectical movement of the contents themselves; so Hyppolite could not, argues Ricœur, write a mere historical introduction to it, or simply comment on them. His only solution, argues Ricœur, was to make an apology of the system.³⁷⁶ He proceeds by questioning the option between the absence of knowledge and Absolute Knowing: “to speak the truth, we are never faced with that kind of alternative; our life is more likely to take place in imperfect, imprecise discourses”³⁷⁷

The objection is turned afterwards against the insistence on ontological negation. Ricœur comments on Hyppolite’s critique of Kant’s and Plato’s use of negation, his diagnosis of the insufficiency of these takes on negation; against Hyppolite, he considers that Plato’s dialectic was already a moving dialectic.³⁷⁸ Let me recall that during this period, Ricœur was lecturing on Plato in Strasbourg.

Ultimately, Ricœur’s objection is indeed an historical objection. Rejecting Absolute Knowing is also tantamount to rejecting the end of history.

It is a great embarrassment when existence is organized in a history that has a certain sense but which is not a logical sense, and reflects itself in a reflection that is not the Self of being. Here’s something that cannot be understood, or reduced by Logic. Furthermore, this reduced historical element takes revenge in several different ways.

This revenge of the existential as historical can be read in the first place in Post-Hegelian history; it is because there is something such as Post-Hegelian history, coming out of the system, because there has been a decomposition of Hegelianism, because there has been Marx, Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, that Hegel’s own work “presents almost insurmountable difficulties”³⁷⁹

So Ricœur’s definitive objection is that history and system do not coincide (and that experience and system do not coincide either) and so Hyppolite’s conflation of the *Phenomenology* and the *Logic* appears to him as fundamentally wrong. His

³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 1380-1381.

³⁷⁷ My translation: “A vrai dire, nous ne sommes jamais devant ce genre d’alternative; notre vie se passe plutôt dans les discours imparfaits, approximatifs,” *Ibid.*, p. 1382.

³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 1386-1387.

³⁷⁹ Concerning the “insurmountable difficulties”, Ricœur is quoting Hyppolite, p. 186. My own quotation of Ricœur is from page 1390.

last objection is a protestation against the subsumption of plurality in what he seems to interpret as a monological system.³⁸⁰

Now, this objection not only against Absolute Knowing but also against any attempt to produce a Hegelian type of logic was directed by Ricœur not only at Hyppolite but also at Eric Weil. We have seen how Weil was instrumental in rehabilitating Hegel's philosophy of right. And he had an important role in the intellectual life of the 1950s in France, being one of the co-founders of *Critique*. However, of all the intellectual figures hovering in Paris' intellectual scene at the time, of all the group drawn to Hegel and Kojève, and which counted, aside from the more obvious figures, also members like Bataille, Weil (probably unjustly) remains today as one of the most forgotten philosophers.

However, at the time, he left a lasting impression on Ricœur and on many others. Ricœur will follow him when defining himself as a "Post-Hegelian Kantian" and will be heavily influenced by his take on the state, his depiction of philosophy and violence as a strict alternative, his views on the "non-violent man", and so forth. I will briefly come back to Weil's influence on *History and Truth* in part three of this thesis. However, for the moment, let me briefly account for Ricœur's reading and reaction to Weil's *Logique de la philosophie*.

Eric Weil was born in Germany and, like so many other intellectuals of his time, fled to France when the NSDAP seized power in Germany in 1933. He was heavily influenced by the Neo-Kantianism movement, having studied under Ernst Cassirer in Germany. However, I think it is fair to say that he embodied one of the most serious attempts to recover Hegelian philosophy, and namely his logic, in contemporary terms. Unlike Hyppolite, he was more than a commentator of Hegel and his philosophy; instead, he attempted to adapt some of the *Logic*'s main principles to his own original philosophy, which was an effort to devise a logic of discourse. There are even some similarities between his own project and an hermeneutic project, and his notion of *reprise* can be compared with both Hegel's *Aufhebung* and Ricœur's own notion of the conflict of interpretations³⁸¹; if we

³⁸⁰ "Le Logos et les discours, la réflexion et les réflexions, la négation et les négations: autant de manières de faire apparaître la difficulté centrale résumée dans le texte précédent." Ricœur, "Retour à Hegel", p. 1391.

³⁸¹ A longer version of this section, dealing with the relationship between Weil and Ricœur in a more extensive manner, can be found in French in Gonçalo Marcelo, "Paul Ricœur et Eric Weil: Histoire, Vérité et Conflit des Interprétations" in *Cultura*, special volume dedicated to Eric Weil *La reprise, les reprises*, edited by Luís Manuel Bernardo and Patrice Canivez (forthcoming).

consider that it is through *Aufhebung* that Hegelian philosophy advances but that ultimately what is constantly presupposed is the movement of the Absolute and the perfection of the system, and that, in turn, Ricœur's own notion of the conflict of interpretations, while resorting to a similar process of negation, is instead fragmentary, open to revision and sometimes aporetic, Weil's *reprise* is somewhere between the two.³⁸²

Weil published his *Logique de la philosophie*³⁸³ in 1950, when Ricœur was writing a series of texts that would later become *History and Truth*. The book tries to reconstruct a logic of categories in purely discursive terms. Weil takes a definition of man as an animal which makes use of language and reason and is thus capable of producing reasonable language or discourse.³⁸⁴ This becomes the human being's distinctive trait. Indeed, argues Weil, if we want to be recognized fully as human beings, we must have access to reasonable discourse and make use of it.³⁸⁵ Adopting a standpoint close to so many others in his time, Weil characterizes our condition as that of a "project", of "becoming"³⁸⁶ through a dialectical process of negation. Nevertheless, as we have seen in Hegel, there are several modes of negation and Weil chooses to underline two: reasonable discourse and violence.

One of his strongest claims is that philosophy and violence are mutually exclusive. Whenever philosophy is exercised violence is stopped, and vice-versa. And this because philosophy is essentially language, discourse, and is geared towards rationality, which entails an exclusion of violence. The language of the philosopher is described as a liberation from dissatisfaction³⁸⁷ and his or her role

³⁸² The similarities between the two projects do not reside only in their respective uses of *reprise* and the conflict of interpretations. The two projects can be compared in what comes down to their takes on history, the reappropriation of Kant and Hegel, and language. These similarities have been noticed, among others, by Gilbert Kirsch, Pamela S. Anderson, Francisco Valdério and Luís Manuel Bernardo. See Gilbert Kirsch, *La Philosophie d'Eric Weil* (Paris : P.U.F., 1989) p. 10 ; Pamela Sue Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant. Philosophy of the Will* (Atlanta : Scholars Press, 1993) pp. 8-9; Francisco Valdério, "Linguagem Violência e Sentido, a propósito de um debate entre Eric Weil e Paul Ricœur" (unpublished conference, *I Colóquio Internacional Eric Weil : Lógica, Moral e Política* (Fortaleza, May 2011) ; Luís Manuel Bernardo, "Paul Ricœur lecteur d'Eric Weil" (unpublished conference, *Reading Ricœur Once Again: Hermeneutics and Practical Philosophy*, Lisbon, July 2010) and also *Linguagem e Discurso. Uma hipótese hermenêutica sobre a filosofia de Eric Weil* (Lisboa : INCM, 2003), p. 23.

³⁸³ Eric Weil, *Logique de la philosophie* (Paris: Vrin, 1985) for the 10th edition.

³⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

³⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

³⁸⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 9 ff.

will therefore be to become an educator, to teach reasonable discourse to others, and to help curtail the unwanted offshoots of negativity. We will never be satisfied, because satisfaction is presence, being, while we are desire and negation. But since there are several ways of exercising negativity, violence should be avoided. Evidently, we can see in these elaborations a tacit response to Kojève.

Weil's standpoint is a curious mix of idealism (although allegedly purified from metaphysical intentions) and a strong practical standpoint, leading to very clear choices in the ethical domain. The whole book is a course between the several discursive categories as the coherent effectuation of reasonable discourse, from Truth to Wisdom, and with a controversial depiction of the last categories, those of the Absolute, Finite, Action, Meaning, and Wisdom. The core of Ricœur's disagreement with Weil would be, not surprisingly, Weil's decision to include the Absolute in his logic, as well as its consequences for the whole undertaking. So let me distinguish between Ricœur's general assessment of Weil's theoretical ambitions, and his appraisal of some of the broad choices made by Weil, with which Ricœur identified. In a nutshell, Ricœur rejected the standpoint of the Absolute, accepted the distinction between philosophy and violence, which went well with his pre-WWII pacifism, and accepted in its main traits the Post-Hegelian Kantianism. But let me start with the first of these assessments, in order to then mention the Post-Hegelian framework and from there move to Ricœur's own complicated relationship with Hegel and his philosophy.

In the first place, it is important to understand how Ricœur read Weil's *Logique de la philosophie* and his evaluation of the status of the category of the *Absolute* in the context of the whole work, as well as its consequences for Weil's philosophical project. In the article "De l'absolu à la sagesse par l'action", originally pronounced as the closing conference in the Symposium dedicated to Eric Weil which took place at Chantilly in 1982, published in 1984 and reprinted in *Lectures I*³⁸⁸, Ricœur undertakes an analysis of the category of *Absolute* in Weil. His aim is to see to what extent the category of *Action* allows for the possibility of maintaining a coherent discourse even after the category of the *Absolute* (let me recall that the *Absolute* precedes the categories of *Finite*, *Action*, *Meaning*, and *Wisdom*). Furthermore, he specifically wants to check the conditions

³⁸⁸ Ricœur, *Lectures I. Autour du Politique* (Paris : Seuil, 1991) pp. 115-130.

of possibility of such a discourse from the standpoint of the categories of *Meaning* and *Wisdom*.

Ricœur starts by noting that there is an “anthropologic turn” in Weil’s depiction of the Absolute: “We are no longer Hegelians when we enter the category of the *Absolute*”.³⁸⁹ Nevertheless, he still sees a strong association with Hegel, because the function of totalization is still there, even if the link is really only functional. He concedes that the content of the category is not Hegelian. But he sees totalization in the fact that the type of discourse found in that category seems to exclude that there might be something coming *after* that category.³⁹⁰ However, Weil indeed chose to place other categories after this one. And Ricœur pinpoints what is for him the main difficulty of the Weilian discourse on this specific occasion: Weil’s admitted goal of trying to fully explicate, or even eliminate, conflicts. In the category of the *Absolute* such as it is presented by Weil we find a discourse which is “unique and absolutely coherent”. Now, Ricœur understands why we should want to leave that category; but he fails to understand how one could utter a fully coherent discourse after having left it.³⁹¹ In fact, he rejects such a possibility. Outside the category of the *Absolute* there is no discourse that can pretend to be “unique” and “absolutely coherent”.

This is indeed one of the main disagreements between Weil and Ricœur, and with it we touch the kernel of their main beliefs concerning the relation between philosophy and history of philosophy, systematicity and openness, repetition, circularity and singularity of the dialogues and conflicts with other philosophies and categories. Ultimately, what is at stake is the status of the coherence and whether or not this coherence is only one among many other possibilities of “coherent discourse”. In other words, what is at stake is Ricœur’s

³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116, my translation.

³⁹⁰ “L’*Absolu*, c’est le bond de l’attitude hors du conflit pour le placer sous le titre de la particularité comprise. Alors ? Hégélien ? Non-hégélien ? La réponse, me semble-t-il, est difficile à décider, sinon indécidable. Je dirai : *contenu* non hégélien, *fonction* hégélienne. Contenu non-hégélien : la séquence « Art-Religion-Philosophie » ne joue ici aucun rôle ; mais le transfert du conflit personnel dans un médium non personnel et son issue dans un résultat qui n’est pas personnel n’en sont pas moins humains. Fonction hégélienne, en ce que le discours dans lequel l’*Absolu* se comprend a un caractère total qui paraît exclure qu’il y ait un après, un au-delà de l’*Absolu*. C’est par cette fonction de *totalisation* que le discours weilien répète, sans le redoubler, le discours hégélien.” *Ibid.*, p. 118.

³⁹¹ “La difficulté majeure pour moi est l’apparente identification du discours cohérent avec le discours totalisant atteint avec la catégorie de l’*Absolu*. Je comprends assez bien pourquoi et comment on quitte l’*Absolu*, mais je comprends mal comment on maintient le projet de discours cohérent au-delà du discours de l’*Absolu*, qui est appelé ici ‘discours unique et absolument cohérent.’” *Ibid.*, p. 119.

perspectivism, but this is an issue that I will only develop in parts three and four of this thesis. In a nutshell, Ricœur argues that the only chance to save the coherence of Weil's categorial discourse is to let it open itself up to the conflict of interpretations. Ricœur sees two possibilities in the reading of Weil's *Logique de la philosophie*. Either we see in it a "symphonic composition" that would allow for a pacific coexistence of the many categories and interpretations – each of which would not annul the others – or we see in it a progress more likely to resemble a linear order leaving no place for an alternative rearrangement or interpretation. Ricœur seems to lament having to see in Weil something closer to the second alternative.³⁹² As for his own standpoint, if it should be fitted in any one of these alternatives, it should be the first.

Ricœur's conclusion forces us to see in Weil a philosophy that ultimately is less open than we would like it to be; this was perhaps the price to pay for having wanted to maintain a coherent and all-encompassing discourse. As Luís Manuel Bernardo has shown, through the emphasis on these features of his discourse, Weil stayed very close to the traditional model of philosophy which he nonetheless proclaimed to criticize.³⁹³ Weil always refused to fall back into a philosophy of the *Finite* and interpretation. Now these will be two assumed features of Ricœur's own philosophy, and which we will see in more detail in parts three and four of this thesis. To summarize, without anticipating too much, let me just underscore that Ricœur wagers less in the coherence of reality, language and philosophy than Weil. For Ricœur, the discourses on philosophy or of philosophy will always only be partially coherent; history and human action, in turn, will only be partially good and they will only *make sense* up to a certain point. Ultimately, for Ricœur, there will remain an ineluctable degree of opacity in human history and reality, as the existence of evil widely attests.

Now, Ricœur is closer to Weil in a number of other aspects, and namely in his political philosophy and the appropriation of Kantianism. *Logique de la*

³⁹² "Le projet de cohérence du discours catégorial de Weil, sans cesse menacé par sa propre réalisation, ne se sauve *in extremis* que si la seconde lecture communique au lecteur la conviction d'une cohérence seulement récurrente. Cohérence récurrente ouverte elle-même à plusieurs interprétations, comprises entre les deux extrêmes d'une composition symphonique qui laisserait attitudes et catégories coexister pacifiquement sans s'abolir mutuellement – ou l'ordre linéaire qui ne laisse place à aucune alternative. Le pari de Weil me paraît plus près du second pôle, celui d'un : il ne peut en être autrement. C'est le pari de Weil." *Ibid.*, pp. 129-130.

³⁹³ Luís Manuel Bernardo, *Linguagem e Discurso*, p. 379.

philosophie is followed by Weil's own proposal of a political philosophy. *Philosophie Politique* is thus published in 1956³⁹⁴ and shortly thereafter Ricœur publishes in *Esprit* a very positive review of this book.³⁹⁵ As Pamela Sue Anderson has pointed out, Ricœur's own review of Weil reveals – in this very short and early text, let me recall – many resonances with Ricœur's later work. In Anderson's words: "The value of Ricœur's review for us lies in the fact that what he says reveals important affinities between Weil's post-Hegelian Kantian discussions of history, narrative, and identity and Ricœur's early work on history and the subject, as well as his mature work on historiography and narrative identity. Like Weil, Ricœur begins with a Kantian grounding, next he confronts the challenges posed by Hegel – as well as by Husserl, Heidegger, and those who follow – but then he claims to return to Kant's philosophy; in this regard they both use the self-description of post-Hegelian Kantian."³⁹⁶ Anderson proceeds to assert that in fact it might be claimed that both Weil and Ricœur never "left" Kantianism, insofar as they always kept a certain grounding in Kant's transcendental subject. She cites Ricœur's claim that all hermeneutics are to a degree, Kantian – which we alluded to above – in that they are an act of finitude, as proof of that claim. Whether or not Anderson is right in her assertion – which should be modulated in the case of Ricœur, given his toning down of the pretensions of the subject in later works such as *Oneself as Another* – she is definitely right in pointing out that the kernel of Ricœur's Kantianism resided in a trait he shared with Weil: they both recovered Kant through an anthropological stance:

Here it should, at the very least, be kept in mind that Ricœur's post-Hegelian reading of Kant is clearly informed by Weil's view that "Il apparaît que le fondement dernier de la philosophie Kantienne doit être cherché dans sa théorie de l'homme, dans l'anthropologie philosophique"³⁹⁷ (it appears that the ultimate foundation of Kantian philosophy must be sought in Kant's theory of man, in his philosophical anthropology).³⁹⁸

³⁹⁴ Eric Weil, *Philosophie Politique* (Paris: Vrin, 1956).

³⁹⁵ Ricœur, "La philosophie politique d'Eric Weil" in *Esprit* 25/10 (1957), pp. 412-28. Republished in *Lectures I*, pp. 95-114.

³⁹⁶ Pamela Sue Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant*, pp. 8-9.

³⁹⁷ Anderson is quoting Eric Weil, *Problèmes kantians* (Paris: Vrin, 1963), p. 33.

³⁹⁸ Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant*, p. 9.

I strongly concur with Anderson's last claim that one of Ricœur's strongest Kantian groundings lies in his anthropology. That is, Ricœur will put forward a philosophical anthropology, and in his philosophical anthropology – as elsewhere – he will also draw on Kantianism and sometimes on Kant's own philosophical anthropology. This will be evident in his emphasis on the notion of hope, drawing on Kant's third question of his anthropology: what may we hope? Indeed, as I already hinted at, Ricœur will give a Kantian treatment to many topics, restricting, like Kant, the objects of knowledge, so that he could leave them for belief or faith; so that he can *hope* for them. Let us see how in more detail in the next section.

With these last notes on Eric Weil, and on Ricœur's reception of Weil, I conclude my very brief section on the early reception of Hegel in France. The reception later grew in scope and acuity, and it can be divided among those who drew an inspiration but also heavily criticized and tried to escape Hegel, like Derrida, Foucault and Deleuze, and the most serious Hegelians, who tried to recuperate the meaning, breadth and scope of Hegel's own writings within a Hegelian framework. Let me mention the works of Gwendoline Jarczyk and Pierre-Jean Labarrière³⁹⁹ as two notorious examples of this serious work. This thesis will not discuss their works or interpretations, because it is focused on Ricœur. But let me emphasize that today, as before, the Hegelian recovery is taking place in France, as elsewhere, in renewed terms.

1.3.6 – Ricœur's conflictual assessment of Hegel: from recovery to mourning, the place of dialectic in human praxis and the Post-Hegelian Kantianism

Like Kant, Hegel was omnipresent in Ricœur's philosophy. Nonetheless, if Ricœur finds no trouble in adhering to Kantian philosophy, if Kant lies there as the silent giant guarding the gates of Ricœur's philosophy and preventing it from unwanted trespassing, his relation with Hegel is far more complicated; dialectical, even. At least from the 1950s onwards, all his books and many of his articles occasionally mention Hegelian topics, sometimes to recover, others to criticize them. More often than not, the rediscovery or discussion of Hegel is done through

³⁹⁹ See for instance Gwendolyne Jarczyk and Pierre-Jean Labarrière, *Hegelianism* (Paris: P.U.F., 1986) and *Les premiers combats de la reconnaissance. Maîtrise et servitude dans la "Phénoménologie de l'esprit" de Hegel* (Paris: Aubier-Montaigne, 1987).

the mediation of other Post-Hegelian authors, with Eric Weil as the leading figure (at least for Ricœur).

Ricœur's insistence on conciliation in his very first books on Jaspers and Marcel is an evidence of the Hegelian influence. In *History and Truth* he discusses the Hegelian state theory through the lens of Eric Weil. Throughout this whole time he strongly opposes the Sartrean emphasis on reified negation, and this even if, as I mentioned before, he worked for decades on negation and kept unpublished lectures on the topic, now carefully analyzed by Alison Scott-Baumann. In the 1960s, Ricœur will for the first time include Hegel as the key of one of his books. Namely, in *Freud and Philosophy*, Hegel's teleological model of consciousness formation from the *Phenomenology of Spirit* will provide Ricœur with the perfect complement to Freud and his archeology of desire.

Later, in books like *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*, Ricœur would recover and use many specific parts of Hegel's practical philosophy, with a special emphasis on *Sittlichkeit* and recognition-theoretical concepts and practices. Ultimately, his positioning towards Hegel will consist in rejecting Hegel's philosophy of history, closed system, monological account of absolute idealism, and so forth, while recovering many of Hegel's meaningful analyzes and intuitions, that is, specific parts of the system. By thus proceeding, he is not taking a very different standpoint from those assumed by Habermas and Honneth.

Nonetheless, his more or less "definitive" account of Hegel was shaped earlier, and it underwent a specific evolution. I could mention many, many texts. But since I will delve in more detail in most of Ricœur's books in parts three, four and five of this thesis, I will keep the discussion in this chapter to a strict minimum. Therefore, I will only mention four texts to which I will not come back in detail in later chapters, and I will analyze these in a chronological order, so that we can have a glimpse at Ricœur's evolution on the matter. First, I will draw upon "Freedom in the light of hope", Ricœur's programmatic affirmation of a Post-Hegelian Kantianism. Then I will proceed to analyze two texts from the same epoch, namely "Le lieu de la dialectique" and "Hegel aujourd'hui". In the first of these texts, Ricœur chooses to carefully circumscribe dialectics to the realm of human praxis; in the latter, he undertakes an assessment of the different phases of Hegelian philosophy that he deemed important, and acceptable, at that time.

Finally, I will mention a section from the third volume of *Time and Narrative*, where Ricœur has his most violent rejection of Hegel. This painful rejection and the subsequent mourning notwithstanding, Hegel – or at least some parts of his philosophy, as I have been often repeating – would ultimately prove to be inescapable for Ricœur up until the very end. But let us start with the programmatic text that sets the tone for his Post-Hegelian Kantianism. As we will see, the text is far more Kantian than Hegelian. But if in this text Ricœur has a deeply ambiguous stance towards Hegel – accepting some intuitions, but mostly lambasting him in comparison with Kant – and if some rejections are definitive, others were later reassessed in the 1970s. As such, we will find partial contradictions in these texts (with the most notorious case of Ricœur’s assessment of Hegelian dialectic), but I will follow the thread of them, paying attention to detail and eventually trying to give a more systematic, if brief, account at the end of the chapter. The first of these texts will provide the Kantian background against which the texts of the 1970s will rebel, before the stage of mourning of the 1980s.

“Freedom in the light of hope” is an article written in 1968 and originally entitled “approche philosophique du concept de liberté religieuse”⁴⁰⁰, later republished in *The Conflict of Interpretations*.⁴⁰¹ Its main topic is supposed to be religious freedom, but in fact its original title can be misleading, because what is at stake is much more than what we usually understand by religious freedom. Ricœur starts by distinguishing several levels in which we can analyze the phenomenon of religious freedom: the freedom of the act of faith, the right to profess a specific religion and “the quality of freedom that pertains to the religious phenomenon as such”.⁴⁰² Very early on, we can feel the Kantian tone. Ricœur tells us that his approach in the text is a “philosophical approach” (to religion). But he then proceeds to explain what he understands by “philosophical approach” in this context:

I take “approach” in its strong sense of “approximation”. I understand by this the incessant work of philosophical discourse to put itself into a relation of proximity with kerygmatic and theological discourse. This work of thought is a work that begins with

⁴⁰⁰ Ricœur, “Approche philosophique du concept de liberté religieuse” in *Archivio di Filosofia* 38 2/3 (1968): 215-234.

⁴⁰¹ Ricœur, “Freedom in the light of hope” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 402-424.

⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 402.

listening, and yet within the autonomy of responsible thought. It is an incessant reform of thinking, but within the limits of reason alone.⁴⁰³

This quotation has a twofold implication. On the one hand, we can strongly feel one of the poles implied by Ricoeurian hermeneutics: its pole of passive, respectful listening, in order to *understand*. It is a pole that will be counterbalanced by critical hermeneutics and the conflict of interpretations, as we will see in part four. On the other hand, there is an active side of interpretation. Ricœur reasserts the autonomy of responsible thought and the “incessant reform” that thinking must undergo. But he stresses that this is to be done “within the limits of reason alone”. With the allusion both to autonomy and to Kant’s *religion*, we could not be more clearly situated within a Kantian framework.

Speaking about an hermeneutics of resurrection, Ricœur states that the task of such an hermeneutics is to “restitute the potential of hope”.⁴⁰⁴ Accordingly, he further claims that “*a hermeneutics of religious freedom in an interpretation of freedom in conformity with the Resurrection interpreted in terms of promise and hope.*”⁴⁰⁵ Clarifying the psychological implications of such a standpoint, he invokes Kierkegaard’s *passion for the possible*⁴⁰⁶ and further adds that within the scope of this hermeneutical exercise, we need to activate imagination. In his own words:

[Hope] is allied with the imagination insofar as the latter is the power of the possible and the disposition for being in a radical renewal. Freedom in the light of hope, expressed in psychological terms, is nothing else than this creative imagination of the possible.⁴⁰⁷

Again, we have the summoning of a Kantian faculty, namely, that of productive imagination. Now, let me note in passing, and as we shall see in part four, that while Ricœur is here speaking against the backdrop of the hermeneutics of religion, he is in fact mobilizing concepts that will be given a huge application in other domains (semantic innovation, the social imaginary, and so on) of his hermeneutics in the following two decades.

⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 406.

⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 407.

⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

However, even if this is a Kantian and hermeneutic framework, Ricœur soon rushes to add a Hegelian element to the mix, allied with a practical import:

A freedom open to new creation is in fact less centered on subjectivity, on personal authenticity, than on social and political justice; it calls for a reconciliation which itself demands to be inscribed in the recapitulation of all things.⁴⁰⁸

With this passage we learn that, in a single move, both the Kantian liberal emphasis on the individual and Heidegger's solipsistic insistence on authenticity are disavowed. With the focus on social and political justice and reconciliation, Ricœur is pointing to a Hegelian, probably communitarian goal.

In the remainder of the article Ricœur elaborates on this particular mix of Hegelianism and Kantianism he wants to put forward. He announces his desire, which is really a programmatic declaration, to creatively develop a Post-Hegelian Kantianism "more to be constructed than repeated".⁴⁰⁹ He declares that he is aware this position entails a paradox, but he also asserts that he accepts the paradox, he owns up to it, both for philosophical and theological reasons. He argues that the exchange between Kant and Hegel still structures the philosophical discourse of his day and age, insofar as the philosophers of his time are "as radically post-Hegelian" as they are post-Kantian and so the task must be "to think them always better by thinking them together – one against the other, and one by means of the other"⁴¹⁰ which amounts to thinking differently from them, because what we think is a combinatory, a particular mix of Kant and Hegel.

And how exactly does he intend to do that? We have no need to take his programmatic declaration at face value. We might even argue that he fails in this Post-Hegelian Kantianism, or claim that such a project is in itself unfounded and relies on a superficial reading of Kant and Hegel. I am not saying that. But I agree that such an objection might be raised, and that the project is in itself inherently paradoxical. But not, in my opinion, self-defeating. Indeed, I think that in many domains of his philosophy, if not in his philosophy *overall*, Ricœur tried to live up to this programmatic statement. And this precisely through the conflict of

⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 409.

⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 412.

⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*

interpretations. Whether or not he succeeded must be assessed in a case-by-case scenario. But I do think he tried.

In this particular occasion, he invokes the “*fissuring power*” of hope, which is capable, or so Ricœur argues, to reorganize meaning and breach closed systems. The topic of hope, Ricœur suggests, is a privileged example of the exchanges and permutations he is talking about. He then proposes to recover the Kantian distinction between reason and the understanding in order to enforce his own – and this almost becomes a mantra for Ricœur – *philosophy of limits*:

The route I propose to explore is opened up by the important distinction instituted by Kantian philosophy between understanding and reason. This split contains a potential of meaning whose suitability to an *intellectus fidei et spei* I would like to demonstrate. How? Essentially by the function of horizon that reason assumes in the constitution of knowledge and will. That is, I address myself directly to the dialectical part of the two Kantian *Critiques*: Dialectic of theoretical reason and Dialectic of practical reason. A philosophy of limits which is at the same time a practical demand for totalization – this, to my mind, is the philosophical response to the kerygma of hope, the closest philosophical approximation to freedom in the light of hope. Dialectic in the Kantian sense is to my mind the part of Kantianism which not only survives the Hegelian critique but which triumphs over the whole of Hegelianism.⁴¹¹

As we can see, this article is rich in strong, eloquent assertions by Ricœur. Here, he recovers the Kantian sense of dialectic we have delved into in the preceding chapter, and emphasizes what he takes to be its most important part: the limiting function, the distinction between understanding and reason that he had already asserted in his lectures “Kant et la négation”. This is his limit to Hegelianism. However, we should not read in his reappraisal of Kantian dialectic a critique to Hegelian dialectic – or if so, only to its totalizing features and the temptation to reach the absolute – because, as we will see, already as soon as five years later, he will set positive goals for Hegelian dialectics.

Shortly after this passage he comes back to Hegel, reasserting what he rejects from Kant, namely, his ethical formalism and specifically his theory of duty. This, he will reassert over and over again. And in fact he mentions §4 of the

⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 413.

Philosophy of Right to affirm that for him “realization of freedom” is indeed the key to a philosophy of the will. All the following paragraph is dedicated to a reappraisal of Hegelian practical philosophy and the several levels of the actualization of freedom and recognition in concrete communities: family, economic collectivity, political community.⁴¹² Ricœur wants in fact to pay homage to the Hegelian philosophy of the will which is “an inexhaustible reservoir of descriptions and mediations”.⁴¹³ And this, while simultaneously always refusing to allow Hegelian philosophy to deplete all meaning.

Ultimately, the conflict between Kant and Hegel is coalesced, for Ricœur, in an opposition between a philosophy of limits and a philosophy of the system. And in this war, Ricœur is definitely on the side of Kant. Ricœur reaffirms the distance that goes between *Denken* and *Erkennen*. The end of the article draws the connection between Kant’s two dialectics and his anthropological third question: what are we allowed to hope for, which structures his philosophy of religion.

Ricœur recalls that the domain of hope is coextensive with the region of transcendental illusion: “I hope, there where I necessarily deceive myself, by forming absolute objects: self, freedom, God.”⁴¹⁴ He recaps the main traits of the Kantian dialectic in its three domains, underlining that there is a legitimate thought of the unconditioned and that this is the reason why transcendental illusion is possible; he also sees in Kant’s critique of the paralogism of subjectivity the foundation of all the critiques of the modern subject, a critique of the cogito *avant la lettre*.

Ultimately, Ricœur follows Kant in placing “pure will” as the “highest good” and he argues that this completion of the will assumes in the context of Kant’s architectonics the same place that Absolute Knowing assumes in Hegel’s system – with the important difference that instead of being an absolute standpoint, something which we could be tempted into filling with a concrete content and claim to know, it is only a *demand*: “Now this totality is not given but demanded; it cannot be given.”⁴¹⁵

As we know, freedom, immortality of the soul and the existence of God reenter the *Critique of Practical Reason* as postulates; Ricœur chooses to

⁴¹² *Ibid.*

⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 414.

⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 415.

⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 417.

concentrate on the postulate of freedom (here understood as the *demand* of the totality of freedom, not its object as such) and asserts that this demand, this expectation, this *hope*, corresponds to his notion of freedom in the light of hope.⁴¹⁶ And his definitive move is to compare this demand for total, uncoerced freedom with its actual conditions of possibility, within Kantianism, and to draw the consequences of this comparison. In order to do so, he turns to the problem of evil and its dramatic implications for human freedom:

What the *Essay on Radical Evil* teaches about freedom, indeed, is that this same power that duty imputes to us is in reality a nonpower (...)

This descent into the abyss, as Karl Jaspers has seen very well, expresses the most advanced point of a thought of limits, which henceforth extends from our knowledge to our power.⁴¹⁷

So here we have an accentuation of the philosophy of limits that Ricœur reads in Kant. Not only are there limits to what I can know, but also limits to what I can do. This was of course already established as the result of the *Critiques* because, as we know from theoretical reason, our freedom is not an absolute, merely a relative beginning in the world; and even if in the exercise of our practical reason we are allegedly operating in the realm of ends and thus moral legislators acting in a completely free manner, it is easy to see that its effectuation might be problematic. The turn to radical evil, as we have seen before, dramatizes the situation, because the origin of the formulation of the maxims might have been corrupted. But this should not be read, in my opinion, as a caution against the power of our agency, which will be highlighted in such a forceful manner by the Ricœur of *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*. Rather, it should be read as an attempt to reinforce the affirmation of our capabilities:

The “postulate” of freedom must henceforth cross through, not only the night of knowing, with its crisis of the transcendental illusion, but also the night of power, with its crisis of radical evil.⁴¹⁸

⁴¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 420.

⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*

Ricœur acknowledges the limitations of the doctrine of radical evil. He subscribes to the critiques of rigorism and formalism of Kantian ethics. But his ultimate stance in this very important article is a recovery of evil as totalization or, in other words, a critique of Hegel through a particular reading of Kant, and pointing towards a critical social philosophy:

True evil, the evil of evil, is not the violation of an interdict, the subversion of the law, disobedience, but fraudulency in the work of totalization. In this sense, true evil appears only in the very field where religion is produced, namely, in the field of contradictions and conflicts determined, on the one hand, by the demand of totalization which constitutes reason, both theoretical and practical, and, on the other hand, by the illusion which misleads thought (...) The demand for a complete object of the will is basically antinomic. The evil of evil is born in the area of this antinomy.

(...) if the evil of evil is born on the way of totalization, it would appear only in a pathology of hope, as the inherent perversion in the problematic of fulfillment of totalization. To put it in a few words, the true malice of man appears only in the state and in the church, as institutions of gathering together, of recapitulation, of totalization.⁴¹⁹

These last few words can be read as a strong critique of alienation in institutions like churches and the state because, according to Ricœur, they can lead to a “falsified expression of the synthesis”.⁴²⁰ So true liberation, for Kant and Ricœur, can only happen when “figures of hope are liberated from the idols of the market place”⁴²¹ (he is here quoting sir Francis Bacon).

I delved deep into this article, because I believe it provides a very important key to understand Ricœur’s Post-Hegelian Kantianism. Not only do we find there its programmatic statement, but also some articulations of it, even though they are sketched very rapidly. We must admit, from the reading of the article, that Ricœur seems much closer to Kant than to Hegel, even if he admits the recovery of Hegelian practical philosophy at some point. But what Ricœur omits in this particular article, and which will only be recovered afterwards, is the way in which the radical critique he starts to emphasize towards the end of the article can gain from the Marxist-Hegelian standpoint. Wasn’t a critique of alienation a

⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 423.

⁴²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 423-424.

⁴²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 423-424.

striking overarching feature of the Marxist-Hegelian tradition? Aren't the "idols of the marketplace" heavily battered by this tradition in their recovery of meaningful human agency and expressivist model?

In fact, even Ricœur's appraisal of Hegelian dialectic would change in the years to come, in later texts, which we shall see in a moment. As for the critique of the standpoint of the absolute and totalization in a given object our analyzes have by now crossed these critiques so many times that they might be taken as acquired. Ricœur later dedicates many other texts to the hermeneutics and philosophy of religion, some of them to Kant and Hegel. I could mention "Une herméneutique philosophique de la religion: Kant" (written in 1992) and "Le statut de la *Vorstellung* dans la philosophie hégélienne de la religion" (written in 1985), both later republished in *Lectures* 3⁴²² but while these texts emphasize different points and follow different leads, they do not alter the significant background of Ricœur's assessment of Kant's and Hegel's take on religion, or his self-professed Kantian "philosophy of limits".

So the Hegelian recovery had to follow other courses for Ricœur. Accordingly, in 1973⁴²³, Ricœur took upon himself the important but dubious task of both trying to "define" dialectic and to find its proper "place" [*lieu*] within philosophy. Five years after "Freedom in the Light of Hope", in "Le 'lieu' de la dialectique" what we see is Ricœur coming back to Hegel's definition of dialectic (as he saw it), and setting Kant aside for a while. Thus for the Ricœur of the mid-70s the task was neither to totally embrace nor totally reject Hegel and the dialectical method; rather, the challenge was to accept its productivity while also narrowing down its scope, finding a proper place where it would fit and bring about something new. We have seen in the last chapter how, for the pre-critical Kant, (real) opposition is reciprocal limitation that ultimately results in zero, a standstill; now, in 1973, Ricœur comes back briefly to the *Negative Magnitudes* essay precisely to insist that the type of opposition at work in (Hegelian) dialectic configures a third type of opposition, different from the two listed by Kant in his 1763 essay, namely, *productive opposition*, "by which we understand an

⁴²² See Ricœur, "Une herméneutique philosophique de la religion: Kant" in *Lectures 3. Aux frontières de la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 1994), pp. 19-40 and "Le statut de la *Vorstellung* dans la philosophie hégélienne de la religion", *Ibid.*, pp. 41-62.

⁴²³ The article was published in 1975, in a book edited by Chaïm Perelman. See "Le 'lieu' de la dialectique" in *Dialectics. Dialectiques* (Entretiens de Varna, 1973), ed. C. Perelman (The Hague: M. Nijhoff, 1975), pp. 92-108.

opposition that, one way or another, allows, facilitates or produces a new thing, in reality or experience, different from the opposing terms.”⁴²⁴

Ricœur acknowledges that hypothetically there could be three different “places” for dialectic, exactly those that make up the three parts of Hegel’s *Encyclopedia*: logic, nature and objective spirit. He evidently states that there is no priority that could be established between any of these domains because, in Hegel’s system, each one of them can mediate the others and the end is the absolute self-knowing whole; but he does claim that from the moment we accept the impossibility of Absolute Knowing, which we by now know Ricœur does, this question of priority must be stated. If dialectic does not form a coherent whole, there must at least be some domain in which it can be exercised. And this domain is to be respected, as dialectic must be protected even if, and maybe to the extent to which Absolute Knowing is rejected. Ricœur even formulates the hypothesis that the Hegelian system itself might not be more than a putting together of processes that are, in themselves, fragmentary and which, ultimately, are not so much a result of the system as they are its main motivations⁴²⁵, i.e. the phenomena that led Hegel to try to form a system in the first place. If this interpretation is correct, I think it probably might be possible to recover Hegelian philosophy altogether, except for the systematic closure. Progress might still be possible, in world history as in philosophy. In fact, this brief hint from Ricœur might be a suggestion of a post-metaphysical reading of Hegel, much like the ones proposed by Habermas and Honneth.

In “Le ‘lieu’ de la dialectique”, Ricœur goes on to argue that the privileged place for dialectics is human reality; this is coherent with Hegel’s assertion that his logic is not, by far, formal logic; it is rather the movement of the things themselves. But if we cannot accept (has anyone really, anyway?) the positing of this kind of movement of nature or the cosmos, then the only place for dialectic is in human affairs, that is, those processes which depend on human will

⁴²⁴ My translation. “Si la dialectique a un sens, une troisième sorte d’opposition doit être supposée, que l’on peut appeler une opposition productive, en entendant par là une opposition qui, d’une manière ou d’une autre, permet, favorise ou engendre une chose nouvelle, dans la réalité ou dans l’expérience, qualitativement distincte des termes opposés.” (Ricœur, “Le ‘lieu’ de la dialectique”, p. 92).

⁴²⁵ “On ne peut écarter l’hypothèse que le système soit lui-même une sorte d’arrangement ultime de procès dialectiques fragmentaires, capables de survivre au système d’une manière ou de l’autre, parce qu’ils n’en résultent pas, mais parce qu’ils l’ont plutôt motivé” (*Ibid.*, p. 93)

and deed, on human action. Or maybe we could also include the hermeneutic realm of interpretation as a “place” for dialectic, as the conflict of interpretations will blatantly show. At this point, Ricœur proposes to distinguish between *action* and *praxis*. We must recall that in this period, 1970-75, Ricœur is starting to systematically delve into the analysis of action in its many aspects; it was from 1971-72 that he would prepare his Louvain-Chicago-Paris lectures on the semantics of action, which deal mainly with the descriptive and analytical aspects of human action, combining for the first time in his philosophy, phenomenology and analytical philosophy. But his claim in “Le ‘lieu’ de la dialectique” is that there are aspects of action that deserve to be called *dialectical*, and to the process of those dialectical aspects he calls *praxis*. These are all aspects that have in common the fact that they entail both an opposition and a dialectical suppression of that opposition through the dynamism of its own process.

He proceeds to develop three aspects (the fact that they are three, each of which more encompassing than its predecessor, speaks volumes of Ricœur’s wish to appropriate, in his own way, the Hegelian tone) of praxis: the dialectic between desire and deliberation in the human will, the dialectic between understanding and will; finally, the dialectic between subjective will and objective will. Each of these dialectics is of course only possible because the oppositions are mediated in what gradually becomes an ever more encompassing perspective. However, Ricœur only goes this far: his last step is the integration of the subjective into the objective will, that is, borrowing the Hegelian terms of the *Philosophy of Right*, the realization of freedom, as well as the unification of a philosophy of the will and a political philosophy in what Hegel calls *objective spirit*. Therefore, we can see how Ricœur, like Honneth, Eric Weil, and so many others, acknowledges the merit of the mature Hegel’s theory of institutions as instances of the rationalization of collective action; and this is, ultimately, what he will take from Hegel at this point: “The rational history of freedom is nothing else than the history of these [three] interwoven dialectics. It is in this sense that we can say that praxis is dialectic at work.”⁴²⁶

⁴²⁶ [My translation] “L’histoire sensée de la liberté n’est pas autre chose que l’histoire de ces dialectiques enchainées. C’est en ce sens qu’on peut dire que la praxis est la dialectique à l’œuvre.” (*Ibid.*, p. 101)

So in 1973 Ricœur is decidedly on the side of Hegel. In this article, he deepens the Hegelian pole: he tells us that nothing shows better the superiority of dialectics than the comparison between Kant and Hegel, between creative dialectic and the “divisive understanding”, the one that results in the antinomies we have seen before; and that, ultimately, even if we have to go “through” Kantianism, we cannot stay within it, because what we need is a philosophy that distinguishes, articulates, hierarchizes and totalizes the moments that the antinomies have divided; ultimately, for the 1973 Ricœur, “this philosophy can no longer be that of the historic Hegel. But it must be a philosophy *instructed* by him.”⁴²⁷ We can see how different this is from the standpoint shown in “Freedom in the light of hope”. But not necessarily totally contradictory.

Ricœur finishes this reflection by saying that dialectics can at most be a “semi-formal style”⁴²⁸ and that probably the only part of dialectics that can be fully saved is its semantic root that ties it to “dialogue”⁴²⁹; however, he does seem to believe in the possibility of dialectics in the domain of human praxis as the articulation of the objective spirit. As such, other than the exploration of dialectics in the domain of human praxis, and the appraisal of Hegelian dialectics as “productive opposition”, I think that what we must retain from this article is this description of Ricœur’s grasp of dialectics as a “semi-formal style”. This is perhaps the kernel of his reappropriation of Hegelian dialectics in a methodological fashion. But we still have two more stops in our course of Ricœur’s complicated assessment of Hegel, before we can summarize it and draw our conclusions.

Shortly after “Le ‘lieu’ de la dialectique” Ricœur writes another article on Hegel, more broad and encompassing in its scope, and perhaps providing a more complete diagnosis of the way he saw Hegelian philosophy in this very important period of his production. “Hegel aujourd’hui” is a text written and published in

⁴²⁷ [My translation] I will allow myself to quote this text more extensively: “Rien ne montre davantage la supériorité du traitement dialectique que la comparaison entre Hegel et Kant. La philosophie de ce dernier reste prise dans des dichotomies insolubles : entre nature et liberté ; entre raison théorique et raison pratique, entre entendement et sensibilité, entre devoir et plaisir (...) Mais s’il faut entrer dans le kantisme, on ne peut y rester. (...) Nous avons besoin d’une philosophie qui distingue et enchaîne, qui hiérarchise et totalise les moments que l’antinomie a séparés. Cette philosophie ne peut sans doute plus être celle du Hegel historique. Mais ce devra être une philosophie *instruite* par lui.” (*Ibid.*, p. 102)

⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 108.

⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

1974, and republished in *Esprit* in 2006.⁴³⁰ It is an article in which he tries to provide the most complete account possible of the several possible entries in Hegelianism and a justification for the interest in Hegel in that particular juncture; furthermore, he also strives to express as clearly as possible what he accepts, and what he refuses, in Hegel.

Firstly, he manifests his surprise for the renewed interest in Hegel since, as we saw in the preceding section, Hegel's recovery in France was done through a mix of "ungrateful" successors: Kierkegaard, Marx, and so forth. The first part of the article has an introductory character – the text was originally delivered in a conference for a wide, non-specialized public, at the Maison de la Culture de Grenoble – and is meant to be a cartography of the main moments of Hegel's thought and its reception (Marx's attack on Hegel's "theology", Kojève's interpretation of the atheist Hegel, the existential interpretations, etc.). Ricœur chooses to concentrate on the connection and relation between the *Phenomenology* and the *Encyclopedia*, with only very brief and cursive references to both the *Logic* and the *Philosophy of Right*. Additionally, he divides his text in a very pedagogical manner; after having presented the outlines of Hegel's philosophy, he puts forward his "questions", "fascinations" and "resistances" towards Hegel's philosophy, that is, the parts of the system towards which he has doubts, those he willingly embraces, and those he decides to criticize and abandon. For its clarity and bluntness, this is a fundamental text to understand Ricœur's use of Hegel. I will skip his presentation of Hegel and go straight to his "fascinations" and "resistances".

The section on the "fascinations" reflects Ricœur's own work in the preceding decade. He recalls how he turned to Hegel to complement the psychoanalytical approach, which we will see in more detail in section 4.3. Commenting on that phase, he retraces the parallelism between the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and Freud to the link between recognition and conflict: "Man wants to recognize another human being in that reciprocity of desire. Desire becomes desire for recognition. Now, this is also the central problem of

⁴³⁰ See Ricœur, "Hegel aujourd'hui" in *Études théologiques et philosophiques* 49, 3 (1974): 335-354 and *Esprit* 323, 3-4 (2006): 174-194. I am quoting from the version republished in *Esprit*.

psychoanalysis, which is also born from conflict, not the one between master and slave, but the battle between every offspring of man and his parental figure.”⁴³¹

The second focus of his interest seems to be closely related with his own personal experience. He mentions Hegel’s theory of objective spirit, and namely the relation between freedom and institutions and adds: “This problem haunts me simultaneously because of an effort to understand my own time and to think a certain administrative experience I have had.”⁴³² No doubt he is alluding to his traumatic experience as Dean of Nanterre in the late 1960s. But whatever the reasons of his interest, Ricœur deplores that in his own time institutions become more and more bureaucratic, while freedom only takes its course in the form of anti-institutional protest.⁴³³ Recognizing in Hegel the main thinker that has tried to conceive of institutions as realms of freedom, Ricœur regrets that this task seems increasingly difficult to undertake in his own day and age. He also revisits his own earlier work on the will, namely the one developed in *Freedom and Nature* and, albeit in a very rapid manner, hints at the ways in which the Hegelian mature philosophy could complement this earlier work.

He mentions that *Freedom and Nature* was a very “subjectivistic, almost solipsistic” work.⁴³⁴ It did not take into account what happens when “a will meets another will”. “It only displayed a lonely man, alone with his body and the world.” Of course that this was a Husserlian-inspired work, written 25 years before. But now, in 1974, Ricœur asserts that “all begins when a will meets another will”.⁴³⁵ He further adheres to the Hegelian principle according to which freedom must renounce its negative power of saying “no” in order to adhere to something concrete, limited, and therefore fully realize itself and he goes as far as to strongly assert the Hegelian standpoint according to which “right is not the enemy of freedom, but freedom’s way.”⁴³⁶ His conclusion is that the Hegelian claim about the right not being an autonomous system but rather the passage from abstract to real freedom is “brilliant and insurmountable”.⁴³⁷

⁴³¹ Ricœur, “Hegel aujourd’hui”, p. 186 [My translation].

⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 187. [My translation]

⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 188.

⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴³⁶ *Ibid.* [My translation].

⁴³⁷ *Ibid.*

A few lines below we find the key to understand Ricœur's take on Hegel: "the heart of Hegel's thought is not his theory of Absolute Knowing, but rather the theory of objective spirit".⁴³⁸ In objective spirit, says Ricœur, Hegel shows that all human situations are "dialectical situations in which meaning is constructed by the means of superseded contradictions"⁴³⁹ and to ram the point home, so to speak, he adds that if we do not make ourselves clear about this, we cannot give an account of what is properly human.⁴⁴⁰ Now, this is as far as Ricœur will get in his Hegelian recovery. At the same time, his assertions here are of vital importance for our proposal, and the course of conflict: without giving an account of conflict and contradiction (whether or not it is superseded) we fail to grasp what is properly human. Again, Ricœur pays his homage to Hegelian dialectics.

Among his resistances, not surprisingly, we find the rejection of Absolute Knowing, the affirmation that there are aspects of human life that resist totalization and elude the narrative of human history as the history of rationalization; he names evil (again) but this time around also the historical event (this is the time he starts thinking about history and narrative, leading up to what ten years later will be the three volumes of *Time and Narrative*) as examples of that which can not be predicted, or rationalized. He chooses to encapsulate Kant and Hegel in his usual formula, but with a new twist: Kant thought the limits, Hegel thought the whole; and he continues to side with Kant in that battle, this time around completing Kant with a certain perspectivism that is characteristic of his hermeneutic phase: "Kant reminds us tenaciously that human experience can not elevate itself to the standpoint of the whole: it is always from somewhere, in what is a certain perspectivism, that we catch a glimpse of the whole of things."⁴⁴¹

Between limit and mediation, Ricœur chooses the limit. Which does not mean that he will not take mediations into account or use them in his philosophy. He indeed will do that, almost always. But the mediations stop at the limit of the antinomies. According to the particular formulation of this text: "even freedom entails taking responsibility for the limits of existence and knowledge".⁴⁴² Ricœur draws from this assertion the practical conclusion that freedom is a risk. If

⁴³⁸ *Ibid.* [My translation]

⁴³⁹ *Ibid.* [My translation]

⁴⁴⁰ "Si vous n'entrez pas dans ce genre de problématique, vous ne rendrez pas compte de l'humain." Ricœur, *Ibid.*, pp. 188-189.

⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 191. [My translation]

⁴⁴² *Ibid.* [My translation]

knowledge were to become absolute, all hope, and all risk, would be gone. He goes so far as to state “after all, what Hegel called knowledge is perhaps only the disguised name for hope”.⁴⁴³ Finally, at the practical level he connects that risk of freedom with the utopian function of imagination, as he will do in more detail in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*.⁴⁴⁴ At the theoretical level, he connects the rejection of Hegelianism with his choosing of a hermeneutical philosophy, for reasons which will be made explicit in part four of this thesis. Suffice it to note, to anticipate, that it is in the name of conflict itself that Ricœur ultimately rejects Hegelianism:

The Hegelian pretention would be to swallow the point of view of the interpreter. And that pretention is untenable. From that follows the most disquieting of consequences: there *are* interpretations. A conflict of interpretations is born out of a sort of disappointment regarding the possibility of making a system. (...) This conflictual situation can never pacify itself, to be reconciled in a total knowledge; we are left with confrontation.⁴⁴⁵

So, in a way, Ricœur is more radical than Hegel in what comes down to conflict. Or at least, let us say, hermeneutic conflict. He rejects the final reconciliation in Absolute Knowing, where all the pluralism of interpretations would be lost. But this is not to say that he rejects conciliation or reconciliation altogether. As always with Ricœur, matters are far more complicated, and there is a whole history of his use of conciliation and reconciliation, both theoretical and practical, that can be drawn from his writings, as I am doing with conflict. Part six will further explicate this relation between conflict and conciliation. But at least Ricœur’s reasons to reject an ultimate, definitive type of reconciliation have already become apparent.

In 1974, this specific article ends with a very telling conclusion. Ricœur states that “the philosophy of interpretation is an unhappy Hegelian philosophy”, insofar as it is spurred by a meditation of Hegel, but renounces its consolation. This is a tragic conclusion. It seems as if hermeneutics is Hegelianism without its proper means. A modest, fragile Hegelianism. This might be true, up to a certain

⁴⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 192. [My translation]

⁴⁴⁴ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, edited by George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

⁴⁴⁵ Ricœur, “Hegel aujourd’hui”, p. 193. [My translation]

point. But Ricœur then turns the burden of proof, claiming that ultimately maybe Hegelianism was only “a philosophy of interpretation disguised (*maquillée*) as a philosophy of knowledge”.⁴⁴⁶ Or, in other words, in its speculative claims, Hegelianism was ultimately nothing more than a fiction. Maybe Hegel was delusional. This is a strong claim. But I think it is final.

This diagnosis notwithstanding, he realizes that the task of thinking meaning, of thinking the social, of thinking our own day and age is a “Hegelian, or quasi-Hegelian task”⁴⁴⁷ and these are his final words of this article. Hegel was thus biting off more than he could chew but through his overambitious system and speculative claims he created a model that is immensely seductive for all the other philosophers who came after him and which nonetheless are simultaneously enticed by his dialectical methodology and pretensions and yet incapable of following him all the way through. All we have is a pale Hegelianism. And yet, through our own partial, conflicting standpoints, we are sometimes able to recover some of the main intuitions of Hegel and adopt them as vital tasks. This is what Ricœur does with Hegel’s theory of the objective spirit, *Sittlichkeit*, recognition, and so on.

But in 1985 in the third volume of *Time and Narrative* Ricœur decides to use strong language to describe his relation and his standpoint towards Hegel. In a chapter called “Renoncer à Hegel” (the English translation is here somewhat misleading, because it translated “Should We Renounce Hegel?”⁴⁴⁸ while in the French original the title has the status of an assertion rather than an interrogation) Ricœur speaks about the “mourning” of Hegel. Before, he was given the status of a temptation. Now, he is “mourned”. Over and above the religious qualification of the terms used, we can see how Hegel and Hegelian philosophy were important for Ricœur, and how ambiguous his relation towards them was; also, how difficult it was for him to “renounce Hegel”.

The particular text he is referring to in 1985 are the *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction – Reason in History*.⁴⁴⁹ This is, of

⁴⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁴⁴⁸ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative. Volume 3*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988), chapter 9, “Should we renounce Hegel?” pp. 193-206.

⁴⁴⁹ Hegel, *Lectures on the Philosophy of World History: Introduction – Reason in History*, translated by Duncan Forbes (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1975).

course, a polemic against Hegel's philosophy of history, since *Time and Narrative* provides Ricœur's mature reflections on history and narrative. He asserts that this is a philosopher's history and not a historian's history (like he had said for Weil before) because only he who traversed the *Encyclopedia* and understood the conditions that make freedom both rational and real is capable of writing such a history.⁴⁵⁰

Ricœur acknowledges that he cannot refute Hegel from inside Hegelianism. Such a task is utterly impossible. But he cannot and will not accept the possibility of a total mediation. Consequently, his detachment from Hegel stems from "the simple expression of our incredulity as regards his major proposition, to wit, (...) 'the idea that reason governs the world, and that world history is therefore a rational process.'"⁴⁵¹ But this detachment comes at a price. The loss of credibility of the Hegelian philosophy of history is dubbed "an event in thinking". Ricœur admits that he does not know whether it is "indicative of a catastrophe that still is crippling us" or "a deliverance whose glory we dare not celebrate". It is, admittedly, a new beginning. But a beginning that must be more sober, if not more somber, than its Hegelian past. Because it is tantamount to the admission that history and human reality are *not* in themselves, rational, or at least that there is no possible way that Hegel could *know* whether or not they are rational.

To follow Hegel would mean to accept that "philosophy can attain not only the present, by summing up the known past, taken as the seed of the anticipated future, but also the eternal present, which assures the underlying unity of the surpassed past and the coming manifestations of life that already announce themselves by means of what we understand."⁴⁵² But this eternal present, and the possibility to grasp it, has been refused by everyone except Hegel. The step that we cannot take, claims Ricœur, is precisely to equate development, the *Stufengang der Entwicklung*, with the eternal present. If we do it, history is abolished by philosophy. And later history in fact proved Hegel wrong.

Ultimately, for Ricœur, what Hegel did was just to extrapolate some particular events of his own time: "It now seems to us as though Hegel, seizing a

⁴⁵⁰ Ricœur, *Time and Narrative*, vol. 3., p. 198.

⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 203.

favorable moment, a *kairos*, which has been revealed for what it was to our perspective and our experience, only totalized a few leading aspects of the spiritual history of Europe and of its geographical and historical environment, ones that, since that time, have come undone.”⁴⁵³ The corollary that Ricœur draws from this is that moving away from Hegelianism signifies renouncing the attempt to decipher the supreme plot.

Ricœur’s last words on this chapter are a denunciation of Hegel’s own condition of finitude. What Hegel did was just to produce an interpretation. But an interpretation that lived above its means, because it tried, as it were, to cease being only an interpretation, and become absolute. And thus Hegel is disavowed, Ricœur dominates the temptation, but himself admitting that something dies with it:

It simply testifies to the fact that we no longer think in the same way Hegel did, but after Hegel. For what readers of Hegel, once they have been seduced by the power of Hegel’s thought as I have, do not feel the abandoning of this philosophy as a wound, a wound that, unlike those that affect the absolute Spirit, will not be healed? For such readers, if they are not to give into the weaknesses of nostalgia, we must wish the courage of the work of mourning.⁴⁵⁴

So mourning it is. But a mourning that will not prevent Ricœur and his Post-Hegelian Kantianism to meaningfully recover Hegelian themes in the definitive version of his philosophical anthropology in the 1990s and up until *The Course of Recognition*.

At the end of these two complex chapters on Kant, Hegel, and Ricœur’s relation towards them, what can we conclude? That, in comparison with his relation with Kant, Ricœur’s relation with Hegel was very complicated. And that while Ricœur rejects the standpoint of the absolute in the name of a hermeneutic, finite philosophy, he does see in Hegel both an interesting and creative notion of dialectics, and very meaningful intuitions of Hegel and applications of his dialectic in the realm of human praxis. The conflict of interpretations will recover something of the Hegelian dialectic, in that it will too want to be a creative procedure that from a given opposition produces new meaning. Furthermore,

⁴⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

⁴⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 206.

Ricœur too would operate conciliations and mediations, like Hegel. But these would ultimately be framed within the standpoint of Kant's "philosophy of limits", as he saw it. As such, the mediation only goes so far. But in between the standstill opposition of the antinomies, which Ricœur will never trespass, there will be a whole world of creative mediation and explanatory power, that parts three and four of this these will render explicit. But for now, and following the lead of this recuperation of dialectic in the domain of human praxis, let us turn to Marx.

1.4 – Marx on History and Class Warfare: Social Conflict

This chapter will be shorter than the preceding ones, not only for lack of space, but also because Marx was no doubt less important for Ricœur's work taken as a whole than Kant and Hegel were. Nevertheless, as in the case of Hegel, Ricœur's relation to Marx was shifting and underwent a certain evolution. I decided to name it "social conflict" not because the social element was not present in Kant, Hegel, or before them. Indeed it was, and the preceding chapters have shown in a sufficient manner, I think, how the Greeks, Hobbes, Kant and Hegel accounted for social conflict. However, Marx and Marxist philosophy were the beginning of something new, because it was with Marx that the link between theory and praxis was more strongly emphasized. Indeed, it was with him that philosophy became not only political philosophy, but a certain strand of it, closer to actual political praxis, and this for both theoretical and practical reasons. As such, this chapter, dealing with Marx and with conflict as allegedly leading to social revolution, will also be the threshold to the next part, where I will deal with the contemporary reappraisal of conflict, mostly in social terms, and starting with a chapter on Critical Theory, which can rightfully be considered a Post-Marxist school with very strong Kantian and Hegelian influences. As such, this chapter, after summarizing Marx's standpoint and the Ricoeurian reception of Marx, will also deal with the beginning of the sociological theory of conflict in the wake of Marx. I will mention Georg Simmel as one notorious example and present a rapid overview of the current situation. This will prepare the ground for the ulterior incursion in Critical Theory which, as is well known, is perhaps the most famous example of an interdisciplinary research tradition recurring to both philosophy and sociology.

Of all the philosophers in world-history, Karl Marx is probably one of those that most heavily insisted on trying to influence society, politics and world-history itself; at any rate, he probably is the one that has had a greater degree of success in doing so, in spite of all the failed attempts to fulfill his prophecies that plagued the 20th century and almost brought it to the brink of destruction. This is stated in powerful fashion in the concise formula of his very famous eleventh

thesis on Feuerbach: “The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it.”⁴⁵⁵

I will leave aside the discussion, largely inspired by Louis Althusser’s analyzes⁴⁵⁶, concerning whether or not there is a “scientific” and a “pre-scientific” Marx, respectively before and after the writing of *The Capital*. Suffice it to say that I do not really believe in a “scientific Marx” or in the “scientific” possibilities of dialectical materialism any more than I believe in Hegel’s Absolute Knowing, and for reasons I share with Ricœur and Arendt. As such, and irrespective of the differences between an “early” and a “mature” Marx, I will downplay the role of the alleged “epistemological break” (*coupure*) and treat Marxist philosophy as if it were the steady development of a social philosophy with some common features that stand over and above the differences brought about by its development.⁴⁵⁷ It is in this context that I will provide a few comments on the twists and turns of dialectic and conflict in the works of Marx.

If it is true that the dialectical development of world history in Hegel is full of tensions that eventually end up in full blown conflicts and political revolutions impregnated with violence, the same is true, and with even greater force, in Marx. This is even more so in that it is not very easy to determine the respective degrees of determinism and voluntarism attributed to human action in Marx’s theory of history; but insofar as a certain degree of freedom is attributed to social actors, then we can say that this conflictual process that almost necessarily entails violence in the form of class warfare ends up being encouraged. And this because the projected *telos* of the end of history and of a reconciled society is postponed. Hegel presupposes reconciliation. Marx *projects* it and, up to some extent, not counting on the Hegelian cunning of reason, makes social change depend on actual human agency. This is, of course, an anthropological reading of Marx but, again, and to reiterate what I also said about Hegel, it is the only way to meaningfully recover his philosophy in terms that can successfully be appropriated and made useful for contemporary social theory.

⁴⁵⁵ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach”, in *The German Ideology* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1998), eleventh thesis, p. 574.

⁴⁵⁶ See Louis Althusser, *For Marx*, translated by Ben Brewster (London: Verso, 2005).

⁴⁵⁷ In what concerns this hypothesis, I am particularly indebted to Axel Honneth. See Axel Honneth “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy” in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 3-48.

1.4.1 – Marx’s Social Philosophy: Estranged labor, Commodity Fetishism and Reification

The early Marx is the one that provides us a more solid ground for this anthropological reading. Indeed, what we find in the *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, and namely in “Estranged Labor”⁴⁵⁸ is a depiction of work as a fundamental social activity, one that properly makes us humans. In this Hegelian-inspired little text, we have both the account of what this activity should be like, its fundamental role of expressing our fundamental possibilities, and also the denunciation of the specific configuration that it assumes under the social forms of organization fostered by capitalist societies.

The *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* are a very peculiar text. As I already mentioned, they were only discovered in 1927, and originally published in Russian. They are fragmentary in nature and the fact that they were manuscripts comprised of writings which were very diverse (comments on readings, notes, brief attempts at conceptualization) makes any interpretation of them hazardous. But the fact remains that many commentators saw in it precisely the most tenable standpoint one can find in Marx, even if we reject dialectical materialism.

The single, most-comprehensive study of the phenomenon of alienation in the early Marx is, to my knowledge, István Mészáros’s *Marx’s Theory of Alienation*⁴⁵⁹, first published in 1970. He mentions Feuerbach, Hegel, and English Political Economy as the most direct influences in the making of Marx’s theory of alienation⁴⁶⁰, but he in fact traces back elements of a history of alienation and liberation thereof in a wide range of cultural phenomena in European thought, and actually going as far back as the Bible, and the lament of being alienated from God, or having fallen from Grace that we can find in it.⁴⁶¹ He also claims that the increasing extension of the market sphere led to a growing “saleability (the fact that we come to view material and immaterial things as objects that be bought or sold) which, in turn, created the conditions for alienation we find described by the

⁴⁵⁸ Karl Marx, “Estranged Labor” in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844* (Amherst: Prometheus Books, 1988), pp. 69-84.

⁴⁵⁹ István Mészáros, *Marx’s Theory of Alienation* (London: Merlin Press, 2005).

⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

early Marx. And he pinpoints the genesis of alienation in Marx's earlier reflections: his doctoral thesis on the philosophies of nature of Democritus and Epicurus, where Marx sees a stage of the "privatization of life" and of "isolated individuality"⁴⁶²; his writings on the *Jewish Question* – where he heavily criticizes "German backwardness" that rejected Jewish emancipation⁴⁶³ – and, of course, the *Critique of the Hegelian Philosophy of Right*, which focuses on the need to criticize all forms of alienation, not only religion alienation, which had been given much attention by Feuerbach.

Now, with this background in mind, let me recall that Marx pinpointed alienation as a structural malaise plaguing workers under the conditions imposed by capitalist societies. In Marx's own words, "the worker sinks to the level of a commodity and becomes indeed the most wretched of commodities".⁴⁶⁴ Marx's analysis postulated, already in this phase, the division of society in two main classes: the property owners and the propertyless workers, that is, as would become clearer in his mature theory, the owners of the means of production, and the productive forces, in the specific relation they assume under capitalist organization.

He explicitly states that he wants to go beyond traditional political economists, who postulate (not unlike Hobbes) a fictitious primordial condition, and competition (led by avarice) as the main motivation of economic relations. Marx further wants to look at the separation of labor, capital and "landed property" and he asserts that what he is stating is an actual economic fact: he observed that "the worker becomes all the poorer the more wealth he produces, the more his production increases in power and range".⁴⁶⁵

Why is this so? Because, according to Marx, labor in capitalist conditions does not only produce commodities. Indeed, it fashions its own nature, and the worker, as *commodities themselves*. This whole part of the manuscript is therefore dedicated to distinguishing four different aspects through which alienation manifests itself, namely, the separation of workers from their inner nature, from their own (working) activity, from humankind taken as such and, ultimately, from each other. Marx described in very powerful terms the consequences that this

⁴⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁶⁴ Marx, "Estranged Labor", in *Economic and Philosophic Manuscripts of 1844*, p. 69.

⁴⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

system produces for those individuals who have nothing left to sell, except for their own workforce: they lose reality. “So much does labor’s realization appear as a loss of reality that the worker loses reality to the point of starving to death.”⁴⁶⁶

This is described as a cumulative process, to the advantage of the owner of the means of production, and causing an inner rupture in the worker: “the poorer he himself – his inner world – becomes, the less belongs to him as his own”⁴⁶⁷, and this because the product of his labor comes to exist independently of him, and not for his fruition, but to be sold by the owner of the means of production. The result is that the worker becomes a slave of his object and of his own working conditions. In a decisive page,⁴⁶⁸ Marx speaks of production as active alienation and depicts the psychological conditions into which the worker is thrown.

In his work, therefore, he does not affirm himself but denies himself, does not feel content but unhappy, does not develop freely his physical and mental energy but mortifies his body and ruins his mind. The worker therefore only feels himself outside his work, and in his work feels outside himself. He is at home when he is not working and when he is working he is not at home. His labor is therefore not voluntary, but coerced; it is *forced labor*. It is therefore not to the satisfaction of a need; it is merely a *means* to satisfy needs external to it. Its alien character emerges clearly in the fact that as soon as no physical or other compulsion exists, labor is shunned like the plague. External labor, labor in which man alienates himself, is a labor of self-sacrifice, of mortification.⁴⁶⁹

This depiction has become famous not only due to the blunt terms with which it describes the psychological breakdown of alienated workers, but also because of the peculiar phenomenon which it successfully grasps: the appraisal of non-working time as “free time” is indeed a sign of existing working conditions as those of a “slave labor”. Marx ends this section by appealing to emancipation but without, however, really specifying what it would be like, which he would eventually spell out in more detail in later works.

⁴⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁴⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 74.

⁴⁶⁹ *Ibid.*

One has to grasp that Marx's depiction of working relations partly reflected Hegel's figure of unequal recognition in the master and slave relationship; his depiction of work as the expression of our being would also find a later resonance in Heidegger, because for Marx it is through work that we express our "most authentic possibilities". There is, as Mészáros underlined, an alienation of human powers, because alienation appears as divorcing the individual from the social, the natural from the self-conscious.⁴⁷⁰ There is thus a potential reading of this early Marx as providing an ideal of expressivism, of seeing human beings as being fulfilled by the way in which, by working, they transform the world. This reading has been put forward by Charles Taylor⁴⁷¹ and I think he is correct in depicting Marx's early philosophy in this manner.

Consequently, alienation can rightfully be considered as a social ill, a social pathology, to use the vocabulary of Critical Theory. As such, the criticisms of Marx can be understood against the backdrop of a critique that aims at transfiguring and transforming the social conditions that made this situation possible, so that this can no longer happen. But this was, in fact, only the beginning of Marx's diagnoses of social pathologies. Indeed, Honneth continues to see Marx as denouncing social pathologies even after the alleged "epistemological break" and the publication of the *Capital*.

In the fourth section of the first chapter of *Capital* (Book 1), entitled "The Fetishism of the Commodity and its secret",⁴⁷² Marx unveils yet another perversion of the way we come to think about the product of our own labor in society. David Harvey points out that this section plays a significant role in the architectonic of the whole book, and indeed it does. Harvey describes its "rather literary style, evocative and metaphoric, imaginative, playful and emotive",⁴⁷³ contrasting with the preceding parts of the book, which are much more technical. Indeed, Marx starts by asserting that even though *prima facie* a commodity seems like a very simple, trivial thing, it abounds in "subtleties and theological niceties".⁴⁷⁴ The fact that Marx is being ironic does not hide the significance of the

⁴⁷⁰ Mészáros, *Marx's Theory of Alienation*, pp. 173-175.

⁴⁷¹ See Charles Taylor, *Hegel*, chapter 20 "Hegel Today", pp. 532-571.

⁴⁷² See Karl Marx, *Capital, Volume One. A Critique of Political Economy*, translated by Ben Fowkes (London: Penguin, 1990), Book I, Part One, section 4 of the first chapter, "The Fetishism of the Commodity and Its Secret", pp. 163-177.

⁴⁷³ David Harvey, *A Companion to Marx's Capital* (London: Verso, 2010), p. 47.

⁴⁷⁴ Marx, *Capital I*, p. 163.

commodity; perhaps can we even argue that the ironic approach is only meant as a performative, namely, the dissolution of an illusion.

Marx starts with the obvious: human beings transform nature in order to produce objects that might be useful. However, as soon as these transformed objects are turned into commodities they seem to acquire a life of their own, that is, they attain, to ordinary perception, a “mystical character”.⁴⁷⁵ And this not in virtue of their use-value but precisely because of their exchange-value, i.e., the fact that they can become part of a trade, or a sale, that might bring advantages to the one who puts them in the marketplace. But why is this mystical and what is the specific perversion entailed in this phantasy?

Marx highlights a characteristic that, to him, had been totally forgotten in prior economic theory, namely, that all labor is in its essence a social activity: “as soon as men start to work for each other in any way, their labour also assumes a social form.”⁴⁷⁶ But he goes further in his description. It is not only that economic theory forgot the social nature of labor relations, or the properly human origin of commodities. It is that people themselves in their everyday relations tend to forget the human origin of these products, to forget that they have originated in the dynamism and features of people, features that have been transmitted to the product and that, *eo ipso*, seem to become characteristics of these things *in themselves*:

The mysterious character of the commodity-form consists therefore simply in the fact that the commodity reflects the social characteristics of men’s own labour as objective characteristics of the products of labour themselves, as the socio-cultural properties of these things. (...) Through this substitution, the products of labour become commodities, sensuous things which are at the same time supra-sensible or social. (...) In order, therefore, to find an analogy we must take flight into the misty realm of religion. There the products of the human brain appear as autonomous figures endowed with a life of their own, which enter into the relations with each other and the human race. So it is in the world of commodities with the products of men’s hands. I call this the fetishism which attaches itself to the products of labour as soon as they are produced a commodities, and is therefore inseparable from the production of commodities.⁴⁷⁷

⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 164.

⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 164-165.

Marx's words in this very assertive passage of course bring to mind Feuerbach's critique of religion. But their impact in fact reaches a dominion totally different from religion in the strict sense. That is, they point towards a very specific phenomenon of capitalist societies, namely, some sort of pantheism of objects, an adoration of those goods that are made for consumption. This passage was of course written in the 19th century, ca. 50 years before the advent of advertising, mass consumption and manipulation techniques associated with psychoanalysis, subliminal messages and the like. And yet that later turn of events only confirmed the extent to which Marx's insight was prescient. The dawn of mass consumption and the cultural industry of course spurred Adorno to elaborate his own critique, very much inspired by Marx's analyzes of commodity fetishism. And one can only wonder what would both of them think and write about the new, pervasive and inventive ways of advertising and the expansion of consumerism in our own day and age.

But there is another side in this somewhat dialectical process. If, on the one hand, things come to reflect and appropriate what are essentially human characteristics and if, by hypostasis and comparison with the phenomenon of religion (in Marx's eyes) they come to be considered as even more than human – in a process of transference that later undergoes a superlative transformation – that is, they come to be seen as Gods, venerated, sought after and pursued... what happens to people, on this occasion? How will they come to be perceived? The answer does not come directly in Volume 1 of the *Capital*, at least not in the developed form it will assume elsewhere. What I am hinting at is of course the concept of reification. If things become Gods, persons become things. To be sure, Marx defines this in passing when he states: "There is an antithesis, immanent in the commodity, between use-value and value, between private labour which must simultaneously manifest itself as directly social labour, and a particular concrete kind of labour which simultaneously counts as merely abstract universal labour, between the conversion of things into persons and the conversion of persons into things."⁴⁷⁸ Or, in other words, personification of things and reification of persons. The expression resurfaces again in one appendix to *Capital*, its planned "Results of the Immediate Process of Production", which would be part seven of the first

⁴⁷⁸ Marx, *Capital I*, chapter two, p. 209.

volume; in that appendix, and when discussing the mystification of capital, Marx again asserts: “Capital *employs* labour. This in itself exhibits the relationship in its simple form and entails the personification of things and the reification of persons.”⁴⁷⁹

What does the “reification of persons” mean? It means, at least in a simplified interpretation, that if the priority is given to, as we would put it our own contemporary terms, consumption and the veneration of objects in a logic of (simple) desire (not, in this case, desire of desire) then we come to treat other human beings, in Kantian terms, as simple instruments in our quest to attain our goals, namely, the consumption of these objects. Luckács, of course, would further develop this notion and make it the center of his social theory in *History and Class Consciousness*, as I alluded to before. In this view, persons come to be viewed as ossified, losing their inner dynamism, they cease to count as partners in interaction and thus fall victim to instrumental use. Adorno and Horkheimer would radicalize this critique and turn it into a whole critique of instrumental reason, as we shall see in the next chapter; and Honneth would propose to redefine once again the concept of reification, seeing in it a moral phenomenon deriving from lack of recognition.⁴⁸⁰

This very rapid overview of three main loci of social pathologies in Marx is in tune with, and is in fact inspired by, Honneth’s own reconstruction of Marx’s social philosophy. In “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy” Honneth describes how Marx’s depiction of social ills operates against the backdrop of an ideal of good life expressed through work: “the possibility of freely and willingly experiencing their own labor as a process of self-realization forms the deciding precondition for a good life.”⁴⁸¹ This necessarily entails an anthropologic and, as I see it, humanistic reading of Marx. And as Honneth claims, even in the transition to *Capital* and a systematic critique of political economy, the anthropologic viewpoint can be maintained. Honneth points out that when Marx criticizes reification he “is compelled to make some

⁴⁷⁹ Marx, *Capital I*, “Appendix”, p. 1054.

⁴⁸⁰ Axel Honneth, *Reification: A New Look at an Old Idea* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007).

⁴⁸¹ Honneth, “Social Pathologies”, in *Disrespect*, p. 14.

strong assumptions about the structures of human self-realization in order to criticize the process of reification as being a hindrance to the good life.”⁴⁸²

Ricœur, as we shall see in a moment, has a reading of Marx that is in tune with this reading of Honneth. Indeed, not only does he have an anthropological reading, he has a *hermeneutic* reading of Marx. This reading was, partly, a counterdiscourse on Marx and Marxism in his own time, which was marked very heavily by Althusser’s imprint. But today a whole new revival of Marxism as only one possible interpretation of the social, and one that is actually very important to understand the functioning of capitalism, its crises, and the structural effects it impinges on people is taking place, in terms very different from those of the past century. Indeed, authors like Emmanuel Renault⁴⁸³ and Stéphane Haber⁴⁸⁴ have contributed to the rekindling of Marxist social theory in a renewed fashion, with an emphasis on the experiences of social suffering and contemporary forms of alienation, and the many forms of non-scientific Marxism, from analytical Marxism to Critical Theory are nowadays once again flourishing.⁴⁸⁵ Now, Ricœur did not assume an orthodox Marxist standpoint – nor do I, for that matter – but he recognized the fertility of Marx’s standpoint and of some of his analyzes. In my opinion, Marxist social theory gains in insight if complemented by Ricœur’s reformulations, which we will see in a moment.

Nevertheless, we still have to mention in a more detailed fashion how Marx envisaged social conflict and class struggle. This is also, obviously, crucial for his social theory and even the analyzes of capitalism. One of the other evident recoveries for our own time are his analyzes of the cyclical crises of capitalism – namely in the tendency of the rate profit to fall, as he presents it in the third volume of *Capital* – which, as later history demonstrated, not only did not cease after Marx’s demise, but in fact turned more severe, as the cases of 1929 and 2007-2009 blatantly show.

⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 15.

⁴⁸³ Emmanuel Renault, *Souffrances Sociales. Philosophie, Psychologie et Politique* (Paris: La Découverte, 2008).

⁴⁸⁴ Stéphane Haber, *L’aliénation. Vie Sociale et Expérience de la Dépossession* (Paris: P.U.F., 2007).

⁴⁸⁵ For a survey of contemporary Marxisms and the recovery of Marx today, see Jacques Bidet and Stathis Kouvelakis, *Critical Companion to Contemporary Marxism* (Leiden: Brill, 2008). See also my interview with Emmanuel Renault: Gonçalo Marcelo et Emmanuel Renault, “Reconnaissance, critique sociale et politique. Entretien de Gonçalo Marcelo avec Emmanuel Renault” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 2/1 (2011): 134-149.

1.4.2 – Marx on dialectic, class conflict and revolution

In this short section, I will describe in a very succinct manner the way in which Marx thinks about social and historical evolution through a paradigm of conflict. I am alluding, of course, to his notion of class struggle or the struggle between those who possess the means of production and those who have nothing to sell but their own working force. This vision of historical evolution is inspired by Hegel and his own *Aufhebung*, with the difference being that Marx understands this process in more negative terms. In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Ricœur emphasizes how Marx operates a simplification, which is at the same time a practical interpretation, of Hegel's *Aufhebung*:

From Hegel to Marx the meaning of *Aufhebung* is reduced to that of abolition, more specifically, practical abolition. In Marx the role of *Aufhebung* as preservation disappears, and it is replaced by an emphasis on *Aufhebung* as suppression alone.⁴⁸⁶

This, in turn, is also accompanied by a diagnosis of world history that somewhat differs from that of Hegel, namely, in positing the end of history not in Marx's actual historical time, not by postulating totality in the eternal present but rather in projecting it as the necessary *telos* of world history in the communist society, which would come naturally, as it were, through the capitalist society's negation of itself in the revolution of the Proletariat. This would entail a final stage in which class war would cease and human beings would live in a natural state of cooperation.

Ricœur does a good job of describing how Marx thinks the necessity of revolution and how this might be seen in terms of an overblown conflict, indeed a *gigantomachia* ruling world history. When commenting on a passage on revolution in the *German Ideology*, Ricœur states:

A revolution is a historical force and not a conscious production. Any consciousness of the need for change is supported by a class. (...) Orthodox Marxism will develop this conflict between structures in terms of what Freud calls, in relation to the struggle between life and death described in *Civilization and Its Discontents*, a gigantomachy, a

⁴⁸⁶ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 52.

conflict of giants. We may read and write history as the clash between capital and labor, a polemical relation between entities, a conflict of historical ghosts.⁴⁸⁷

Of course that, in Marxist terms, this revolution is brought by the contradiction between modes of production and productive forces, i. e., when this contradiction reaches a breaking point. This conflict is, evidently, a socio-economic one.

This amounts to Marx's own version of dialectics, or what came to be known as "dialectical materialism" or "historical materialism", even though it is somewhat disputed whether or not Marx exactly saw it in this way, since the later elaborations of materialist dialectics are mainly an originality of Engels and his Marxist successors. The places where Marx chooses to discuss dialectics are mainly the prefaces or postfaces to the several editions of *Capital* published during his life. As such, these can be understood as, maybe not simplifications, but sharp statements made with an eye to the larger public. His main assertion concerning the inversion of Hegelian dialectic and his materialist version of it can be found in the Postface to the second edition of *Capital*:

My dialectical method is, in its foundations, not only different from the Hegelian, but exactly opposite to it. For Hegel, the process of thinking, which he even transforms into an independent subject, under the name of "the Idea", is the creator of the real world, and the real world is only the external appearance of the idea. With me the reverse is true: the ideal is nothing but the material world reflected in the mind of man, and translated into forms of thought. (...)

The mystification which the dialectic suffers in Hegel's hands by no means prevents him from being the first to present its general forms of motion in a comprehensive and conscious manner. With him it is standing on its head. It must be inverted, in order to discover the rational kernel within the mystical shell.⁴⁸⁸

Now, Marx's own presentation of Hegel is of course sketchy and simplistic. But what interests me, and what constitutes a very important stage for our own concise history of conflict in philosophy, is the way he emphasizes that all social evolution is led by socio-economic infrastructural conflicts. Indeed, in the hands of Marx, conflict is given center stage, maybe even more so than in Hegel. For Hegel, in the

⁴⁸⁷ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 92.

⁴⁸⁸ Marx, *Capital I*, "Postface to the Second Edition", pp. 102-103.

process of *Aufhebung* reconciliation is a constant part of the evolution whereas, for Marx, reconciliation is allegedly not metaphysical, only social, and only postulated in the future; reconciliation is *not* therefore, as present in Marx as it was in Hegel. But the same cannot be said about social conflict as history's driving force.

In what is perhaps the best biography of Marx, and also a very lucid commentary on his philosophy, the young Isaiah Berlin describes this process in stark kinetic terms:

In fact progress is discontinuous, for the tension, when it reaches the critical point, precipitates a cataclysm; the increase in quantity of intensity becomes a change of quality; rival forces working below the surface grow and accumulate and burst into the open; the impact of their encounter transforms the medium in which it occurs; as Engels was later to say, ice becomes water and water steam; slaves become serfs and serfs free men; all evolution in nature and society alike ends in creative revolution. In nature these forces are physical, chemical, biological: in society they are specifically economic and social.⁴⁸⁹

Obviously, the depiction in these terms reinforces Marx's alleged scientific pretensions. But this was, as far as we can see, as Marx saw it: that is, history develops following a dialectic pattern and this, in turn, is a continual process of negations through clashes between different socio-economic classes. This is how we have evolved from slavery to feudalism, to capitalism and eventually, Marx believes, we will reach communism.

What exactly the role for human agency is in this structural explanation, is a disputed interpretation. We might argue, for example, that crises of capitalism provide the agents with the opportunity to bring about revolution, but not necessarily lead them to do so, that is, that without Hegel's cunning of reason, there is no motive to believe Marx has a 100% deterministic stance. But this is, of course, our own anthropologic reading of Marx, our own wish to see in this picture nothing more than social agents unfairly deprived of the means to live a fully human life, and therefore striving to overcome their dire conditions. Maybe Marx would not agree with this take, and argue that his was a properly scientific, i.e., deterministic approach, determining laws of social evolution and its outcome. But

⁴⁸⁹ Isaiah Berlin, *Karl Marx*, p. 92.

we do find in Ricœur a confirmation of this approach, and this is a lead I want to follow.

Today, Marxist thinkers in the English-speaking world are striving to renew his dialectic in contemporary terms, sometimes assuming the form of a critique of culture; of these Fredric Jameson's effort is certainly the sharpest.⁴⁹⁰ Most of these interpretations are of course a mix between Marx's and other popular strands in our own day, namely Postmodernism. My own account of the fruitfulness of Marx's insights brings them closer to Critical Theory and hermeneutics. I believe this is the same path chosen by Ricœur. So let us assess his relation to Marx throughout the years.

1.4.3 – Ricœur's latent Marxism: from early adhesion to mature moderation

We have seen how, in the writings of Karl Marx, we can find a depiction of social conflict as class struggle and to what degree his philosophy provides us with several invaluable insights for social philosophy. In the next chapter, I will briefly venture into the works of social philosophers in the Frankfurt School tradition, showing how they incorporated a critical reception of Marx into their depictions of society and the analysis of the phenomena of conflict and struggle within it.

What I want to look into right now is an aspect of Ricœur's early philosophical formation and social and political positioning that is usually overlooked or downplayed. This is the fact that during the years 1936 to 1938 (when he was roughly 23 to 25 years old) and thus, before his imprisonment during WWII, he could actually be considered a Marxist, even though, obviously, not a dogmatic one. In fact, his relationship with Marx is a critical one, as is the case with Kant and Hegel. We can argue that ultimately the presence of Karl Marx in Ricœur's philosophy is given less space than that which is allocated to Kant and Hegel, even though Marx is placed alongside Nietzsche and Freud as one of the three "masters of suspicion" during the 1960s period, and although the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* will further develop his critical usage of Marx.

⁴⁹⁰ See Fredric Jameson, *Valences of the Dialectic* (London: Verso, 2009).

However, these early formative years saw Ricœur assuming a strong position of social engagement; at this time, he assumed he was, in what could be described as being an unconventional standpoint, a socialist, a Christian and a pacifist.⁴⁹¹ I mean unconventional by our own standards, but certainly not to the social meaning of Christianity, at least as it was understood by Ricœur. In his Christian socialist standpoint, he was heavily influenced by the socialist protestant André Philip, who was an active member of the French resistance, and who played an important role in the French political scene, both before and after the war, as a member of the *Front Populaire* and, later, as a member of several post-WWII governments.

Taken by this movement of social Christianity which, ultimately, aims at bringing about the word of Christ in the social domain (namely by tackling the most acute social plagues, such as misery) Ricœur thus turns to socialist solutions indeed, criticizing the obsession for profit (and thus the insistence in concurrence) and even preconizing a centralized planning of economy. During this period of 1936-1938 Ricœur thus publishes articles in dissenting newspapers such as *Terre Nouvelle* and a small, almost secretive newspaper called *Être*. The main kernel of his standpoint is expressed in the formula which he used to define himself: *socialiste parce que chrétien*, he was a socialist because he was a Christian, that is, his social(ist) engagement stemmed directly from his Christian vocation.

In the article “Socialisme et Christianisme”⁴⁹², from 1937, he explains in further detail this mutual implication: a) the Christian vocation has an inbuilt social claim; b) this claim leads to a radical condemnation of capitalism, to the point that he can claim to be “revolutionary, because he is a Christian”; c) in order to overcome capitalism he has to mobilize historical, sociological and political judgments; d) combining these evaluations with the Christian social claim, he concludes that there is a need for concrete political action. He thus has to risk taking that action, and assuming it.

Thus he turns to the most obvious expression of socialism with a philosophical background and a knack for political action through the positing of the union between theory and praxis: the thought of Karl Marx. As such, in a short

⁴⁹¹ On this interesting period of Ricœur’s life, see the chapter 4 of Dosse’s biography, pp. 47-63.

⁴⁹² Ricœur, “Socialisme et Christianisme”, in *Être* 1,4 (1936-1937): 3-4.

article significantly called “Nécessité de Karl Marx”⁴⁹³ [The need for Marx, or The necessity of Karl Marx] he significantly calls for the need to rightly appropriate the thought of Marx, draws a sharp distinction between what he calls a “dogmatic Marxism” and a “Critical Marxism” and concedes that Marx is right on many points, including the significance of class struggle, but he charges him with an oversimplification that we could label, in more contemporary terms, a kind of reductionism, due to the alleged scientific character of historical materialism.

It is interesting to note that Ricœur writes this small text in 1937, at roughly the same time when Max Horkheimer, by that time already exiled in the U.S.A., writes “Traditional and Critical Theory”⁴⁹⁴, the programmatic text that would officially launch Critical Theory as a new research paradigm, and that would largely contribute, through the responses it spawned, to the real constitution of a “critical Marxism”. It is very likely that Ricœur ignored the existence of Horkheimer and Critical Theory at this point, but one cannot but note certain similarities in their projects.

Ricœur’s main charge is that the economic emphasis on class struggle, and the status of almost a “dogma” that it assumes in historical materialism, with its emphasis in the infrastructure to the detriment of the superstructure, only captures a partial picture of the real motivations of human action, and human conflict, in society.

[Marx] neglected the realm of the passions, of the irrational beliefs, of myths – a realm which is relatively autonomous from the economic one. (...) The start of the 20th century and namely the period after the World War, are almost incomprehensible if seen as a simple interplay of economic forces. It is equally explained by *myths* and *interests* (such as the economic nationalism, fascism, the division of the workers’ unit and also of the big international capitalism. The history of the world’s passions is relatively independent from its material history. Illusion and pride bear a blindness which resists economic interest. From this we can adduce a significant complication principle – by which I mean, a complication of history, but also of the judgment we bear on history.⁴⁹⁵

⁴⁹³ Ricœur, “Nécessité de Karl Marx”, in *Être* 2,5 (1937-1938): 6-11.

⁴⁹⁴ See Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory” in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 188-243.

⁴⁹⁵ “Il a négligé le règne des passions, des croyances irrationnelles, des mythes – règne relativement autonome à l’égard du règne économique. (...) Le début du XX^{ème} siècle, et surtout l’après-guerre, sont à peu près incompréhensibles par un simple jeu de forces économiques. Il

This interest in myths, and in the multiple motivations for human action, resonates strongly with the work Ricœur later undertook in the 1970s and 1980s. What he aims at in this article is the possibility of finding some humanist traits in Marx – as he does not mention the *1844 Manuscripts* I ignore whether or not he knew them at the time when he wrote the article – and to put forth the value of the human person over against the hypostasis of History and its anonymous processes. In fact, he takes class struggle to be a *fact*, but he claims Marx is making a mistake when he reduces all forms of alienation to economic alienation:

Marx made a description of what *is*. Class struggle is first and foremost a *fact*, before being a *mean of action*. And the real means of action is to become conscious of this fact. For me, Marx's only mistake was not to have shown the historic role of class struggle, but to have excluded the other forms of man's alienation, or to have forced them to be reduced to class struggle.⁴⁹⁶

As Ricœur would elaborate two decades later in “The Political Paradox” there is a certain type of alienation that is not economic but specifically political, and which is as bad, if not worse, than political alienation (and that article marks the beginning of Ricœur's official detachment from the communist societies, so often admired in the intellectual context of post-war France).

Nonetheless, in 1937, in the name of social justice, he takes a voluntarist approach to Marxism and to Marx's claim for the abolition of classes and the bringing about of the classless society. But he also maintains that if this social pathology of economic alienation is eliminated, still there will be other pathologies affecting the human being, which will not magically disappear even if the putative

s'explique autant par des *mythes* que par des *intérêts* (tels le nationalisme économique, le fascisme, la rupture de l'unité ouvrière, et aussi du grand capitalisme international). L'histoire passionnelle du monde est relativement indépendante à l'égard de son histoire matérielle. L'illusion et l'orgueil ont un aveuglement imperméable à l'intérêt économique. Il y a là un principe de complication considérable – j'entends : de complication de l'histoire, mais aussi de complication de notre jugement sur l'histoire.” Ricœur, “Nécessité de Karl Marx”, p. 8 [My translation].

⁴⁹⁶ “Marx a décrit ce qui *est*. La lutte de classes est d'abord un *fait* avant d'être un *moyen d'action*. Et le vrai moyen d'action c'est de prendre conscience de ce fait. Pour moi son seul tort n'est pas d'avoir montré le rôle historique de la lutte des classes, mais d'avoir exclu les autres formes d'aliénation de l'homme, ou de les avoir réduites de force à la lutte des classes.” *Ibid.*, p. 9 [My translation].

classless society becomes a reality. I will allow myself to quote a slightly longer passage, to show how clear and straightforward is Ricœur's position at this time:

Marx is right against those who want to leave things as they are, against those who want to *reconcile* classes instead of *annulling* them, by attacking their root: private property of the great means of production.

But he is wrong in believing that at that point man will finally be human, work will be joyful, the heart will be contented. Yes, it is possible, by the technical means at our disposal, to feed everyone bread, and to found order and authority on function and competence. But still man will remain odious and adulterous; liar and proud; irrational and greedy, because there are more ways than one to be alienated. Marx is right: there will be no more exploitation of man by man *in that specific way*. But he is wrong when he says: there will be no exploitation of man by man *at all*.

This argument still assumes that each human flaw is absolutely independent, as if man could be only partially healed. Rather his evils are tied to one another, his heart is made of one piece only. Marx gave us the recipe for one cure. I believe this is the right cure. But our expectations must be of a realization that will necessarily be inferior to what we dream of. Not only will man not be healthy because he has one less pathology, but he will not even be partially healthy. This pessimism does not reject hope, or action. We have to work not *for* success, but *because* the action is true. Men will ruin the work. But it is in this sense that we must act. We have to know how to translate the Marxist *prophecies* into *demands*. They will not *truly* BE; they *MUST truly* be.⁴⁹⁷

⁴⁹⁷ "Marx a raison contre ceux qui veulent laisser les choses en état, contre ceux qui veulent *réconcilier* les classes au lieu de les *supprimer*, en frappant à la racine: la propriété privée des grands moyens de production.

Mais il a tort quand il croit qu'enfin l'homme sera humain, le travail joyeux, le cœur satisfait. Oui, il est possible, dans l'état actuel de la technique, de donner du pain à tous, et de fonder l'ordre et l'autorité sur la fonction et la compétence. Et pourtant l'homme restera haineux et adultère; menteur et orgueilleux; irrationnel et cupide, parce qu'il a d'autres façons d'être aliéné. Marx a raison: l'homme n'exploitera plus l'homme *de cette façon là*. Marx a tort quand il dit: l'homme n'exploitera plus l'homme *du tout*.

Encore raisonne-t-on comme si chaque tare de l'homme était absolument indépendante, comme si l'homme pouvait être guéri sur un point. Ses maux sont solidaires et le cœur de l'homme d'une seule pièce. Marx nous a donné la recette d'une cure. Je la crois bonne. Mais il faut s'attendre à une réalisation bien inférieure au rêve. Non seulement l'homme ne sera pas sain parce qu'il aura une maladie de moins, mais il ne sera pas partiellement sain. Ce pessimisme ne rejette ni en dehors de l'espérance ni en dehors de l'action. Il faut travailler non *pour* le succès, mais *parce que* l'action est vraie. Les hommes gâcheront l'ouvrage. C'est pourtant dans ce sens qu'il faut agir. Il faut savoir transcrire les *prophéties* marxistes en *exigences*. Elles ne *SERONT pas vraiment*; elles *DOIVENT être vraiment*." *Ibid.*, p. 9.

For those acquainted with Ricœur's usual tone, it is interesting to note the pamphletary style, so distant from his mature production. This is obviously the adequate tone to the type of publication, and social juncture, that framed his specific situation at that point. Already we see a specific philosophic anthropology based on the multiplicity of passions, on the *thumos* that prevents any overemphasizing of our rational control, and still, a strong belief in the power of action or, as we could say in our own terms, in human capabilities. It is also noteworthy that he adopts the vocabulary of the *diagnosis*, addressing certain social pathologies, claiming that they are all tied together, and showing how the cure for the economic problems would leave the rest unsolved.

Concerning the real possibilities brought about by the communist regimes, Ricœur later became, as so many others like him, disappointed with the way history actually turned out. I cannot trace all the details of the evolution of Ricœur's political standpoint, but the fact of the matter is that he later became a foolproof democratic liberal, even though always retaining his social engagement and his left-leaning sympathies.

Throughout his career, and faithful to his style of trying to think the political events of the present time – a feature that brings him close to Critical Theorists – Ricœur would display a continuing interest in Marx and Marxism, also to reflect upon the political landscape of his own time. This was particularly evident in the late 1950s and early 1960s, when the Soviet Union was already showing its true, deceptive colors. As such, in this period, and always in an independent and critical fashion, Ricœur writes a series of texts reflecting upon the Marxist legacy and socialism. This is the case of “From Marxism to Contemporary Communism” (1959), of “Socialism Today” (1961), both published in English in the collection *Political and Social Essays*⁴⁹⁸ and of “La crise du socialisme” (1959). All three texts were published in *Christianisme Social*, the official journal of the protestant Association that had Ricœur as its president from 1957 onwards⁴⁹⁹, and that sometimes served as a vehicle for some of Ricœur's own political standpoints. In “La crise du socialisme” Ricœur notes and deplores that

⁴⁹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *Political and Social Essays*, edited by D. Stewart and J. Bien (Athens: Ohio University Press, 1974), chapters “From Marxism to Contemporary Communism”, pp. 217-228 and “Socialism Today”, pp. 230-242.

⁴⁹⁹ For more details on this, see chapter 25 “Christianisme social sous la présidence de Ricœur” of Dosse's biography, pp. 256-266.

industrialization was already producing a type of society allergic to politics, communitarianism and revolution and where man understood as a mere consumer was becoming ever more alienated from himself, from others, and from nature, thus echoing the early Marx's analyzes of alienation. Over against this reality, he mobilizes the power of utopia, as he would do later. At this time, he still put forward a proposal of a regulated, "planned" economy, over against liberal market deregulation.

As Bernard Dauenhauer rightfully notes, at this point in time, and actually for a long period, Ricœur was unsatisfied with liberal capitalism and its consumerist values, and he never displayed any enthusiasm towards Soviet Communism.⁵⁰⁰ In his early years he was inspired by Andre Philip and Karl Barth, seeking to unite socialist ideals with his Protestant faith; during the 1950s, as a member of *Esprit* and the Christianisme Social movement, he kept assessing world events, like the rise of Mao in China. But throughout this whole time he seemed unsatisfied with both these political forms and pleaded for a third way. Nonetheless, as Dauenhauer recalls, "The sort of socialism that would serve as a satisfactory third way, however, was not readily available. A crucial political task was to rethink what socialism ought to be. Ricœur took up this task in two ways. First, he offered a diagnosis of the obstacles that impeded the development of a genuine socialism. Then, he developed proposals for what this socialism should call for."⁵⁰¹ As such, we can see Ricœur's fascination for Marx's original insights which were, however, betrayed in real political practice in the Soviet countries.⁵⁰² This fascination increasingly led to a critical relationship; first, with Ricœur's notion of the political paradox, and the distinction between economic and political alienation (a direct critique of the repression taking place in Soviet Countries), which we will see in more detail in part three of this thesis. Secondly, with the critique of the Marxist notion of ideology, such as we can find it in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, which date from 1975.

In these lectures, Ricœur offers a glimpse at a very important phenomenon in social philosophy, namely the social imaginary and the creative paths it creates to meaningful action. I will only do justice to the lectures in part

⁵⁰⁰ See Bernhard Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricœur, The Promise and Risk of Politics* (New York: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998). pp. 78-80.

⁵⁰¹ Dauenhauer, *Ibid.*, p. 79.

⁵⁰² Ricœur, "From Marxism to Contemporary Communism", *op. cit.*

five of this thesis, in the chapter on Ricœur's social philosophy. But since in that book no less than five chapters are dedicated to Marx, and three more to Althusser, I will have to mention them now. In the *Lectures*, Marx is mobilized because of the phenomenon of ideology, not utopia (and this for obvious reasons, as the main use of the pejorative epithet "ideological" in political or social theory derives from Marx's definition of ideology or some offshoot of it).

What is interesting to mention is that Ricœur only tackles the early Marx, that is, the one from the *1844 Manuscripts* and *The German Ideology*. He only mentions *Capital* in passing, in order to see what changes were there in Marx's depiction of ideology after the *German Ideology*. The motive behind Ricœur's lack of interest in the *Capital* (other than these are lectures we are talking about and, as such, given a restricted amount of time, and so Ricœur had to restrict himself to present only condensed versions of what he was teaching) lies perhaps in Ricœur's rejection of dialectical Marxism as a science.

In the first chapters, Ricœur follows the thread that runs through Marx's early writings and that, influenced by Hegel and the left Hegelians, comes to identify reality and human praxis⁵⁰³ As he states, "The writings of the early Marx may be seen as a progressive reduction of the Hegelian "Spirit" through the Feuerbachian concept of species being to the properly Marxist concept of praxis."⁵⁰⁴ By following this thread, he will eventually come to Marx's early definition of ideology as being opposed and concealing this reality, that is, true human praxis. Ricœur dubs Marx's standpoint at this point in time "an idealistic atheism"⁵⁰⁵ breeding the humanistic anthropology I mentioned before.

When delving into the *Manuscripts* he chooses to emphasize "Estranged labor", in order to recover its meaningful analyzes.⁵⁰⁶ He sees a connection between the notion of ideology and the framework of the *Manuscripts*, insofar as in this first book we catch a glimpse of the origin of the ideological phenomena that will be repudiated in the *German Ideology*. When commenting on Marx's critical recovery of the political economists that preceded him, Ricœur offers a hint at a further possible way to recover Marx, namely, to consider his standpoint to be nothing more than a critical hermeneutics:

⁵⁰³ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 21.

⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-22.

⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁰⁶ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, chapter 3, pp. 35 ff.

We may say, very cautiously, that Marx's analysis here is a hermeneutics of political economy. It is a critical hermeneutics, since political economy conceals the alienation native to the labor process.⁵⁰⁷

We might argue that in this and similar passages, Ricœur is identifying himself, to some extent, with Marx's project (or at least with some sparse elements in it), because when reading Marx, Ricœur is interpreting Marx's project in his own terms, using qualifications that he might use to describe his own project. Further proof of this interpretation comes when Ricœur considers that in the *Manuscripts* the notion of communism plays the role of a utopia.

Could we not say, then, that we have another perspective on alienation: may we not look at alienation and judge it from this nowhere of utopia? Does not all judgment on ideology proceed from the nowhere of utopia?⁵⁰⁸

Ricœur acknowledges that from the strictly Marxist standpoint, this interpretation is futile, inasmuch as for Marx a utopia is not needed to reflect upon ideology, i.e., contradiction proceeds from contradiction itself and in this dialectical movement ideology (and the capitalist conditions that foster it) will eventually negate itself and be canceled.

But it goes without saying that Ricœur has never been interested in orthodox Marxism, and he was far from being Marxist *stricto sensu*. So these passages only reinforce my reading: Ricœur is highlighting certain passages in Marx and describing them in his own terms because he in fact wants to recover a part of the Marxist project for his own philosophy. Ricœur himself rams this point home a few pages later. First, recalling once again Marx's critiques of political economy (and namely its alleged analytical approach), he starts depicting them by using the very powerful metaphor of the "closed book":

What is destroyed by this process of analysis, says Marx, is the concept of society; humanity becomes a "closed book". What is needed, therefore, is the unconcealment or unsealing of the closed book.⁵⁰⁹

⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 55.

However, and in a bold claim, Ricœur allows himself to complete the preceding statement with the following assertion:

This concept of the closed book may be a source of the opposition, prevalent in orthodox Marxism, between ideology and science. Science becomes the reading of the closed text of industry. I would argue, however, that only when we view the text as open may we get out of the world of estrangement. Perhaps science needs to be supported by utopia in order to unseal the sealed book.⁵¹⁰

In a single move, Ricœur manages to reject the determinist assumptions of orthodox Marxism *and* claim that a critical hermeneutics, that is, *his* project – alongside the one put forward by the Habermas of his time – might be a useful way to *open up* the world of action and indeed *free* human action. He ends the chapter recalling Marx's project of liberation, the category of anticipated totality of a free humanity and he asserts: "We may take this question as at least the content of a project."⁵¹¹ He ultimately links Marx's project of liberation through work with Kant's depiction of autonomy.⁵¹² Ricœur would ultimately deny that we are fully autonomous, and this for Hegelian and anthropological reasons, tied to our fallibility, the intersubjective webs of interdependence in recognition, and so forth. But he would retain a project of liberation through hermeneutics as a practical project. I will come back to this project in part five, and to my own reactualization of it, in the last chapters of this thesis.

One of Ricœur's main rejections of Marx is seen in the following chapters of these lectures. For Marx, hermeneutics could never, as such, be critical, because it pertains to the superstructure and it ultimately is ideological.⁵¹³ Ricœur only sees in Marxism an anthropological interpretation with practical purposes, so he must disagree with Marx and, over against Marx, emphasize that the "superstructure" (that is, the world of representation and interpretation) will ultimately have to bear an influence in "infrastructures" and that these, in turn, cannot be so rigid as Marx thought they were. Ultimately, this comes down to a

⁵⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*

⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁵¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 66-67.

⁵¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

certain influence of methodological individualism in Ricœur. Even if we are dependent on communities and intersubjective webs of relationships, Ricœur does not really believe in the sociological significance of the notion of “class” and so class struggle and the whole belief in the process of revolution being necessarily put forth through class struggle is for him very problematic. Ricœur sees in Marx, as I have emphasized earlier, a theory of human agency. He sees this at least in the *German Ideology*: “People’s assertion of themselves as individuals is fundamental for understanding the process of liberation, of abolition. Liberation is the claim of the individual against the collective entities.”⁵¹⁴ He further asserts that even though workers suffer as members of a class, they react as individuals.⁵¹⁵ Ricœur thus sees not only a competition between individuals and structures as a motivating force behind history in Marx’s *German Ideology*, but indeed the possibility of free agency in the Marxist early theory of history. In fact, he almost hints at what Axel Honneth calls the processes of solidarity and resistance of disenfranchised, disrespected individuals, each of which constructing a “semantic bridge” through a shared semantics rooted in common experiences. Ricœur comments: “even if in the labor process workers are only cogs and act as class individuals, when they meet their comrade in the union, it is as real individuals. They extract themselves from the class relationship when they enter into this other relation.”⁵¹⁶

With these last lines of Ricœur’s assessment of Marx drawn, I think the picture is now clear. Ricœur recovers a hermeneutic Marx as much as he rejects a scientific Marx. The following three chapters of the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* proceed to refute Althusser and later Marxism and their attempts to see in Marx’s *corpus* a paradigm of science. For the same reasons, Ricœur does not really go into the *Capital*. He sees in Marx the powerful depiction of conflict through revolution, but he denies that this revolution, or liberation itself can be brought about by a necessary unfolding of social structures and will instead argue that if indeed emancipation is a meaningful project, it can only be understood as a process led by the motivations of free agents, real individuals exerting their agent causation and liberating themselves from oppressing structures. Without knowing

⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

⁵¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 98.

⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*

it, Ricœur was coming very close to what Honneth will later describe as the struggle for recognition. Likewise, Ricœur would keep a permanent interest in the social and political events of his time, and would not neglect to comment or intervene on them, as we will see in later chapters.

1.4.4 – The affirmation of conflict in sociology: Simmel's conflict theory

Marx was thus the grandfather of conflict theory in the particular mix between philosophy and what later came to be known as sociological analyses. However, if indeed Marx can be credited with bringing conflict to the forefront of sociological theory, we can not say that he was the only author to do so; in fact, the emphasis on conflict has had many offspring in sociology, so much so, that a whole theoretical field, significantly called “conflict theory”⁵¹⁷ has been spawned, to the development of which authors such as Georg Simmel⁵¹⁸ or more recently Ralf Dahrendorf⁵¹⁹ and Lewis Coser⁵²⁰ have contributed, not to mention Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, whose contributions we will mention more fully in the next chapters. While this is not the place to analyze in detail “conflict theory” in sociology, I would like to mention one of the most important classical contributions to this topic, namely Georg Simmel's.

In *Conflict*, Georg Simmel describes the sociological pertinence of conflict in its many forms, from conflict between individuals within a social group to widespread conflict among groups in society, and to war among nations. He analyzes social phenomena such as quarrels in the family, performance competition among individuals in capitalist societies, and tries to reflect upon the conditions that can provide solutions for these conflicts (either by victory, compromise or conciliation) as well as the cases where irreconcilability is inevitable. Simmel's analyzes, while questionable in some points – Simmel sometimes cannot avoid trying to explain a multitude of phenomena in a few

⁵¹⁷ For an overview on the matter, see Randall Collins, *Conflict Sociology: Toward an Explanatory Science* (New York: Academic Press, 1975). See also Jeffrey C. Alexander, “The Centrality of The Classics” in *Social Theory Today*, edited by Anthony Giddens and Jonathan Turner (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1987), pp. 40-42.

⁵¹⁸ Georg Simmel, *Conflict and The Web of Group-Affiliations*, translated by Kurt H. Wolff (New York: The Free Press, 1964).

⁵¹⁹ Ralf Dahrendorf, *Class and Class Conflict in Industrial Society* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1959).

⁵²⁰ Lewis Coser, *The Functions of Social Conflict* (New York: The Free Press, 1956).

words, which can result in oversimplifications – are in fact full of psychological insight and sociological relevance.

Simmel retains something of the Hegelian dialectic; in fact, he states that “conflict contains something positive. Its positive and negative aspects, however, are integrated; they can be separated conceptually, but not empirically”⁵²¹ and goes on to argue, concerning our perception of unity and variety, that it “would perhaps be correct to posit neither as first but to assume an infinite rhythm where we cannot stop at any stage we have calculated but where we must always derive that stage from an earlier, opposite one.”⁵²² However, differently from Marx, he does not focus exclusively on class warfare or even on economic conflict, nor is the organization of the means of production the decisive factor in his analysis.

Rather, for Simmel, conflict plays an essential role in the socialization [or, in his terms, *sociation*, *Vergesellschaftung*] of social actors. It can act to introduce actors in a group (thus producing the unity of a social group), as for instance when one group of people comes together to protest or oppose someone else, or to break down already existing unities (as when, for instance, a political party is divided in two opposing factions). Furthermore, when social groups are fueled by the dynamic of conflict (that is, when the cohesion of a certain group comes from its opposition towards another group, person, or policy) as when, for instance, minorities under repression come together to fight and resist, conflict can mitigate, in some sort, the social suffering of those who come together in that way: “opposition gives us inner satisfaction (...) [it] makes us feel that we are not completely victims of the circumstances.”⁵²³ This psychological satisfaction would, as we will see in next chapter, play a key role in providing the objective conditions for the mobilization of social movements of protest; Axel Honneth will speak about the “shared semantics” of disrespected social actors who share their experiences and find in group solidarity the force to struggle. According to Simmel large groups united by a common goal can be cohesive enough to endure even residual conflicts among its members without necessarily losing its characteristic of overall internal solidarity.⁵²⁴

⁵²¹ Simmel, *Conflict*, p. 14.

⁵²² *Ibid.*, p.108.

⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p.19.

⁵²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

Ultimately, what I would like to emphasize is that Simmel stresses that in what comes down to social conflict, there is a specific dialectic between the states of conflict and the states of peace: “in historical reality, each of the two conditions uninterruptedly relates itself to the other”.⁵²⁵ He notes that peace is much more than a mere “tiredness of fighting”.⁵²⁶ It is rather a positive outcome, wanted and achieved by itself; however, we are never certain that its results are permanent. We have to make sure that the conditions that brought it about can be maintained. A conflict can end because one of the parties wins, or because there is a dissolution of the object at stake. Simmel even hints at the conflict of interpretations, speaking of the “theoretical controversy where the problem is unexpectedly solved by a higher intelligence and both conflicting positions are shown to have been wrong”⁵²⁷, in a way strongly resonating of Kant and that, up to a certain extent, anticipates Ricœur. From Simmel’s refined analyzes we can retain the pervasiveness and the multiplicity of the phenomena of conflict, the fact that they can be overcome and bring about positive results but also the fact that these results are fragile and provisional.

Ultimately, if Marx had the merit of putting social conflict at the forefront and with that inspire the later sociological theories, these theories gained in insight with many other elements: Weber’s analyzes of social stratification and the exercise of power, his emphasis on going beyond the analysis of social classes and attention to individuals, through his method of elective affinities (inspired by Goethe) and methodological individualism (later further developed by Schumpeter) all gave way to sociology’s attention to a multiplicity of conflicts taking place at the social level. Furthermore, the analysis of power relations in the Poststructuralist movement – namely Foucault’s own emphasis on the modes of subjectification – served as a reinforcement for sociology’s conflict theory, and made sure conflict could not be ignored either by sociology or political philosophy. This confluence of interests was fundamental for social theory in the 20th century, and I want to take a better look at Critical Theory as one the most fertile instantiations of conflict theory in this juncture.

⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

⁵²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

Part Two

The Contemporary Reappraisal of Conflict

In part one I provided a brief historical account of the significance of conflict in philosophy, from the Greek source up until the main philosophical occurrences of the Kant-Hegel-Marx triad. I also mentioned, here and there, the contemporary recovery of these philosophies in their many forms, from the Hegelian and Marxist renaissance to the social philosophy of Arendt and, evidently, the way this was all taken up and assessed by Ricœur.

This second part can be read as a continuation of the first, in that its method is somewhat similar. I am also interested in following the rule-governed polysemy of the philosophical occurrences of conflict, but the difference is now chronological. That is, if part one dealt with those authors which we sometimes like to call “classics”, part two will mostly analyze the contributions of philosophers who all made their contributions in the 20th or 21st century. Indeed, the overwhelming majority of philosophers whose works I will mention in this part are still actively putting forward new works and theoretical proposals. As such, any assessment of the significance of their overarching contributions to philosophy – or even to conflict theory – is riskier than was the case for the philosophers dealt with in part one; nevertheless, on the other hand, their contributions are at least as relevant, if not even more so, than those of the “classics” because they are all, in one way or another, taking up the questions which are *our questions*, the questions of our own day and age.

As such, I will be drawing a very rapid cartography of the way in which conflict was discussed in philosophical terms in more recent decades. This will be, in a very humble way, an attempt at a quick history of the present time, that most paradoxical of tasks, and which nonetheless was pinpointed by both Foucault and Critical Theorists as being a fundamental one. My method here will be the same used in part one: first mention the contributions of the main authors themselves, and then, when there have been meaningful reactions from Ricœur, to see how he incorporated their contributions.

The main criteria will therefore be twofold: the relevance of these contributions to understand the inner workings of conflict, and also the impact that they had in the making of Ricœur's own philosophy. I decided to divide this part in three different chapters. First we have an assessment of Critical Theory in its three different generations. Because this is, or at least meant to be at its inception, a "school" – the Frankfurt school, the other name that identifies their main theoretical orientations – I include a very brief historical reminder of its origin and aims, and recall some of the issues addressed in each of its three main stages. That is, I recall what were the theoretical ambitions of the main representatives of each of the three generations of Frankfurt School: Adorno and Horkheimer, Habermas, and Honneth. This is of course a very partial and "official" history, but it had to be done in this way for lack of space; I will neglect to mention, or only mention in passing, such important authors as Walter Benjamin, Herbert Marcuse or Albrecht Wellmer, but this is the price to pay for wanting to tackle such a complex and rich history in a small chapter. In the most substantive part of the chapter I will see how three authors differently emphasized conflict: Habermas and his take on communicative action and an ethics of discussion, Honneth and his insistence on the struggle for recognition and finally Mark Hunyadi and his apology of conflict as a notion with both theoretical and practical import, in what he calls the "virtue" of conflict. With these three authors, conflict will be given center stage in the contemporary discussion.

If, in the first chapter, the particular mix between philosophy and sociology will be taken for granted, because all of these authors were some way or another influenced by these two theoretical domains, in the second the same collusion will take place but in a more artificial manner. In my defense, I can say that this mixture has been inspired by a certain Ricœur, the Ricœur of the mid 1990s, and particularly the author of *The Just*. Its main characters will be John Rawls, Michael Walzer, Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. As such, it is a debate simultaneously inspired by sociology and political philosophy. It could be labeled, at first glance, a classical debate between the liberal and the communitarian stances; but it even though it is indeed one such debate, it is also much more than that. It is, as Ricœur saw it, a conflict between the universal aspirations of justice and its plural instances and instantiations; a conflict that, furthermore, will mobilize an explanation of actions and justifications thereof

from the standpoint of the actors themselves, through the “sociology of critique” of Boltanski / Thévenot.

Lastly, I will dedicate the third and final chapter of this part to the figure whose work is probably closer, in its scope, breadth and framework, to Ricœur’s. In this chapter, I will look at Charles Taylor’s take on what he takes to be the conflicts of modernity. These will be not strictly historical conflicts, but fundamental conflicts in the shaping of our own identity. With Taylor, my brief overview of the contemporary reappraisal of conflict will be over; after that, we will enter the course of conflict in Ricœur’s own work.

2.1 – Habermas, Honneth and Hunyadi: Communicative Action, the Struggle for Recognition and the Virtue of Conflict

The last chapter of part one was dedicated to Marx's emphasis on social conflict, and to some of the sociological developments it has led to. The history and fate of Marxism in the 20th century is well known, as are the disastrous results it has led to in different parts of the world. My aim here will not be, in any way whatsoever, to draw the history of theoretical Marxism, and even less the history of the socialist movement from the first International to the constitution of communist parties, and all the political happenings that took place between 1917 and 1989.

Nonetheless, there is a particular strand of Marxism, which sometimes went by the name of *Critical Marxism* that I want to address – namely, *Critical Theory*. Critical Theory is a hugely important movement for conflict theory because not only does it take social conflict seriously, but it also provides a much more supple and non-deterministic background to it. This chapter will be dedicated to the main representatives of the second and third generations of Critical Theory, namely Jürgen Habermas and Axel Honneth, and I end it with Mark Hunyadi. However, a brief historical introduction to the whole movement will be provided, because it will also contain some elements that will offer an inspiration for the later parts of this thesis.

The *Institut für Sozialforschung* was founded in 1923 in Germany and forced to move in 1933 to the U.S.A., when the political situation dramatically changed in Germany. From the start, it fostered an interdisciplinary research project halfway between philosophy and sociology, and with a strong psychoanalytical influence. Kant, Hegel, Marx and Freud provided the main theoretical framework, and the “school” allowed for contributions from thinkers so different in their scopes and styles as Horkheimer, Benjamin, Marcuse, Adorno and Fromm.⁵²⁸

We can say, in a very schematic and cursory manner, that the particular mix of ideas which framed the movement contained simultaneously a belief in

⁵²⁸ For a detailed account of the foundation of the Frankfurt school and its early years, see Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination. A History of the Frankfurt School and the Institute of Social Research, 1923-1950* (London: Heinemann, 1973).

progress and an emphasis on history partly borrowed from Hegel (although stripped down of its systematic pretensions), a methodology of immanent critique of reason borrowed from Kant (reason as a transhistorical instantiation in history) and a diagnosis of society as a locus of social conflicts and class struggles, evidently inspired by Marx.

As Axel Honneth has shown, from its very beginning, Critical Theory could be seen as developing a kind of social philosophy⁵²⁹, one that tied a methodology of social critique to a belief in moral progress and a genealogical proviso⁵³⁰ aimed at assessing the origin and validity of social values. Not that there was a single methodology encompassing the production of all its members. But there was certainly the postulation of a connection between theory and praxis, and the establishment of a practical aim. And nowhere is this programmatic coherence stronger than in the early writings of Max Horkheimer.

2.1.1 – The making of the Frankfurt School: Horkheimer and the task of critical theory

In his 1937 programmatic essay “Traditional and Critical Theory”⁵³¹, Horkheimer described Critical Theory as an effort that would bridge the gap between theory and praxis. Critical theorists would produce a critique of the present time that would, in virtue of its own activity, contribute to bring about emancipation. In the words of Horkheimer, the own nature of the critical thinker’s activity “turns it towards a changing of history and the establishment of justice among men”.⁵³²

For him this is, in fact, the difference between “traditional theory” and critical theory. Developing a critique that has some echoes in Heidegger’s (as well as Gadamer’s and Ricœur’s) critique of the Cartesian cogito, Horkheimer describes how in traditional theory, subject and object are placed “at a distance”.

⁵²⁹ See “Pathologies of the Social: The Past and Present of Social Philosophy” in *Disrespect. The normative foundations of Critical Theory*, pp. 3-48.

⁵³⁰ See “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso: On the idea of ‘critique’ in the Frankfurt School” in *Pathologies of Reason. On the Legacy of Critical Theory*, translated by James Ingram (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009), pp. 43-53.

⁵³¹ See Max Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory” in *Critical Theory. Selected Essays* (New York: Continuum, 1972), pp. 188-243.

⁵³² *Ibid.*, pp. 242-243.

That is, how the conception of the object can bear no relation to the subject who produces it; this is, more or less, what Charles Taylor will call “disengaged reason”. If we want to use Aristotle’s categories, the production or consideration of even something as a “theoretical” object (or subject-matter) in traditional theory is seen by Horkheimer as the result of a pure *techné*, rather than the possibility of a *praxis*. However, according to him, science, knowledge and “intellectual” affairs are as much a result of the capitalist distribution of labor as anything else.

As such, they are not, in themselves, “neutral”.⁵³³ They are, and the social sciences in particular might we add, the birthplace of what MacIntyre called “essentially contested concepts”.⁵³⁴ Over against the hypostatization of Logos⁵³⁵, Horkheimer wants to assert the agency of free individuals in the making of a critical theory. According to him, when the theoretician depicts societal contradictions, these not only express the result of a historical process, but also “a force within it to stimulate change”.⁵³⁶

The result is that this theoretician is engaged in the struggle. And curiously enough, Horkheimer presents the positive prospect amid the experience of negativity (Honneth will assert the same thing, when depicting the struggle for recognition). Horkheimer claims that “the community of those engaged in the struggle experiences something of the freedom and spontaneity which will mark the future.”⁵³⁷ This, in fact, is the admission that the struggle has a very specific *telos*, namely, the emancipation from the conditions of domination. The role of theory is even in fact to *intensify* the struggle.⁵³⁸ This is, indeed, the reason why early Critical Theory remains fundamentally Marxist: the role of theory is to “lead to a heightening of those social tensions which in the present historical era lead in turn to wars and revolutions”.⁵³⁹

However, it goes without saying that critical theorists were *unorthodox* Marxists. They kept themselves strictly apart from the Communist Party and did

⁵³³ This is explicitly claimed: “There is likewise no theory of society, even that of the sociologists concerned with general laws, that does not contain political motivations, and the truth of these must be decided not in supposedly neutral reflection but in personal thought and action, in concrete historical activity.” *Ibid.*, p. 222.

⁵³⁴ See Alasdair MacIntyre, “The Essential Contestability of Some Social Concepts” in *Ethics* 84,1 (1973): 1-9.

⁵³⁵ Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory”, p. 198.

⁵³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 215.

⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 218.

⁵³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 219.

⁵³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

not follow the indications of the International. This partly explains the different paths led by the theoretical enterprises of Adorno and Horkheimer on the one hand, and Luckács, on the other (notwithstanding the important role that Luckács played in inspiring critical theorists, mainly through the analyzes of reification that he undertook in *History and Class Consciousness*). As Honneth explains, part of their effort was to undertake more refined sociological analyzes than Marx. They wanted to understand why the Proletariat had failed to bring about the revolution.⁵⁴⁰

Now, if the Proletariat is not the “universal class” as both Marx and Luckács believed⁵⁴¹, what is there left to do? It seems that Horkheimer’s standpoint, at least in 1937, is radically voluntarist. Theory will help bring about the change that is needed. Here is his most forceful and engaged argument:

A consciously critical attitude, however, is part of the development of society: the construing of the course of history as the necessary product of an economic mechanism simultaneously contains both a protest against this order of things, a protest generated by the order itself, and the idea of self-determination for the human race, that is the idea of a state of affairs in which man's actions no longer flow from a mechanism but from his own decision. The judgment passed on the necessity inherent in the previous course of events implies here a struggle to change it from a blind to a meaningful necessity. If we think of the object of the theory in separation from the theory, we falsify it and fall into quietism or conformism. Every part of the theory presupposes the critique of the existing order and the struggle against it along lines determined by the theory itself.⁵⁴²

What Horkheimer wants to avoid is, therefore, quietism and conformism. In 1937, the programmatic affirmation of Critical Theory is therefore of the inextricable link between theory and praxis. However, this was about to suffer a major shift in the following years.

⁵⁴⁰ See Gonçalo Marcelo, “Recognition and Critical Theory today: An interview with Axel Honneth, in *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 39, 2 (2013): 212.

⁵⁴¹ See Marx, “The Communist Manifesto” (published in *The Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, *op. cit.*), and Luckács, “Reification and the Consciousness of the Proletariat” in *History and Class Consciousness*, pp. 83-222.

⁵⁴² Horkheimer, “Traditional and Critical Theory”, p. 229.

2.1.2 – The Pessimistic turn: Adorno, Horkheimer, and the critique of instrumental reason

Historical events do not explain everything, and we are certainly not allowed to discern the meaning of a philosophical work in a “psychologist” way, by deducing the alleged psychological motives and intentions of their authors. However, I think it is safe to assume that WWII and the subsequent revelations of the Nazi horrors, especially the Holocaust, did much to alter the tone of the early critical theorists. Other events played a role as well. Martin Jay recalls some of these difficult circumstances, which led to their pessimistic phase in the late 1940s: “Disillusioned with the Soviet Union, no longer even marginally sanguine about the working classes of the West, appalled by the integrative power of mass culture, the Frankfurt School traveled the last leg of its long march away from orthodox Marxism.”⁵⁴³

In what became the greatest classic of the first generation of Critical Theory, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*⁵⁴⁴ (written in 1944), Adorno and Horkheimer in fact present us with a rather harsh diagnosis of reason and its use. The fact that they chose to name it “dialectic” and to qualify it by explaining that these were “philosophical fragments” is in itself a whole program. Indeed, the choice of the word “dialectic” suggests the process of evolution through contradiction, but the fragments indicate us that the book is at the same time a critique of the category of totality and totalitarianism. “Enlightenment”, on the other hand, is not taken to be a historical period – or if indeed it was, it is seen as just the peek of a movement that had been developing since Antiquity – but rather as being synonymous with reason in a very specific sense. Indeed, what Adorno and Horkheimer want to denunciate is the use of reason as instrumental. That is, they see the exercise of reason as being ultimately connected with violence, repression and domination of both inner and outer elements. In this, consequently, they are being more radical in their diagnosis than Marx himself. Consequently, they are not ignoring social conflict but they seem to be arguing that conflict is more pervasive than mere social conflict. In this, they are perhaps more Hegelian than Marxist, because their

⁵⁴³ Martin Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 256.

⁵⁴⁴ See Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, *Dialectic of Enlightenment: Philosophical Fragments*, edited by Gunzelin Schmid Noerr and translated by Edmund Jephcott (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2002).

dialectic is more pervasive. Except that it is evidently a dialectic without *Aufhebung*. Jay emphasizes how radical this conflict is: “The clearest expression of this change was the Institut's replacement of class conflict, that foundation stone of any truly Marxist theory, with a new motor of history. The focus was now on the larger conflict between man and nature both without and within, a conflict whose origins went back to before capitalism and whose continuation, indeed intensification, appeared likely after capitalism would end.”⁵⁴⁵

Reason thus comes to be identified with the effort to dominate both inner and outer nature. By exercising reason, we repress our instincts and become disciplined; pursuing that effort, we also come to dominate nature (eventually to the brink of destruction) and manipulate or even subjugate others; reason is therefore paradoxically tied to its other, that is, myth – “Myth is already enlightenment, and enlightenment reverts to mythology”⁵⁴⁶ is one of the main claims – and even to the possibility of utter destruction. Already in the preface, the picture that is drawn is very somber:

The aporia which faced us in our work thus proved to be the first matter we had to investigate: the self-destruction of enlightenment. We have no doubt—and herein lies our *petitio principii*—that freedom in society is inseparable from enlightenment thinking. We believe we have perceived with equal clarity, however, that the very concept of that thinking, no less than the concrete historical forms, the institutions of society with which it is intertwined, already contains the germ of the regression which is taking place everywhere today.⁵⁴⁷

To be sure, Adorno and Horkheimer's claim is ambiguous. Even if they talk about regression and self-destruction, they affirm, as we can read in the passage above, that there is a way to reach freedom through the use of reason. It is in virtue of this belief that they still profess the need to exercise a critique of the present time, one that provides it with the reflexive conditions needed for the exercise of meaningful agency. But they are at the same time struck by Nazism, the rise of anti-Semitism and the widespread use of myth for mass manipulation. Furthermore, they are equally disillusioned by the structural conditions of late capitalism, and namely the

⁵⁴⁵ Jay, *The Dialectical Imagination*, p. 256.

⁵⁴⁶ Adorno and Horkheimer, *Dialectic of Enlightenment*, p. xviii.

⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xvi.

manipulation taking place within mass culture. All this leads them to conclude that manipulation, domination and alienation can assume many forms, not only the type of economic alienation presupposed by Marxism. Ricœur would come to a similar conclusion in the text “Political Paradox”. But whereas Ricœur emphasizes political alienation, Adorno and Horkheimer lambast cultural alienation, alongside these other forms the malaise can assume.

What Adorno and Horkheimer ultimately do is to narrate the history of progress in an unorthodox manner. It is, we could say, an alternative, subversive narrative. In this story, reason has the tendency to self-destruct, as we can see in the ruthless, meticulous “rational” procedures of the Nazis and their campaigns of extermination. In this account, moreover, reason is in itself mythological, giving birth to myths: “But the myths which fell victim to the Enlightenment were themselves its products.”⁵⁴⁸ Throughout the whole book, they emphasize what they consider to be the main trait of reason: to command, to transform, to manipulate.

Enlightenment stands in the same relationship to things as the dictator to human beings. He knows them to the extent that he can manipulate them. The man of science knows things to the extent that he can make them.⁵⁴⁹

Consequently, if “Enlightenment” has perhaps the merit of liberating from the magic properties of ancient myths, reason, on the other hand, not only also becomes mythical, but by becoming repressive, by excluding and being dominant, it ends up enslaving human beings under its equalizing power. As they say, this power “amputates the incommensurable (...) human beings are forced into real conformity”.⁵⁵⁰ We are thus at the mercy of repressive equality, according to their depiction. Even the substitution of ancient myths, in their diversity of versions, for unified concepts is seen as a sign of command.⁵⁵¹

The division of labor and the reification of people into different social classes is of course seen as further proof of the violence of reason. In what has become a very famous analysis, they depict the myth of Odysseus as being the

⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

example of domination by the cunning of reason: he alone can enjoy the beautiful and alluring singing of the Sirens, whereas his fellow travelers are forced to work for him and be deprived of aesthetic contemplation. Odysseus, in a single move, dominates others and his own inner instincts. He can contemplate danger, but without falling victim to its charms; he does not lose control.

Ultimately, they see reason as running the risk of becoming totalitarian, and they see myth reabsorbed and transformed in contemporary culture; likewise, they see forms of domination not only in barbarous political circumstances such as those of the Germany of their times, but also in the reification of persons in the marketplace. Mass culture is the ultimate proof of commodity fetishism. Cultural industry is seen as being akin to propaganda, where originality is lost and equalization is the rule, where culture is sold like objects and prepared to be revered for economic purposes. As such, mass culture is ideological (in the pejorative sense) and it must therefore be criticized.

To be sure, Adorno and Horkheimer still seem to believe in the possibilities of emancipation. But like Nietzsche before them, they appear to suffer from the fact of not being able to say yes with the same force they say no. The *Dialectic of Enlightenment* is a beautiful, severe, insightful, essential book. But it is mainly a book made up of critiques and rejections: a critique of the process of reason, of progress, of pragmatism and instrumentality, over-unification, over-conceptualization, capitalism, political voluntarism, the culture industry and so on. They seem to have difficulties conceiving of other uses of reason other than the strictly instrumental one, and are very pessimistic about the possibilities of reconciliation. Or, better put, they see a possibility for aesthetic redemption, but acknowledge the difficulties of a real political liberation through revolution – even if they long for it. All these traits would ultimately coalesce in Adorno's later writings, such as *Negative Dialectics*. In the transition from the first to the second and third generations of Critical Theory, the theoretical landscape will be radically altered. If, on the one hand, there is something of the brilliance, cultural erudition and attention to aesthetics that is definitely lost, on the other hand, much is gained in theoretical insight, sociological relevance and interdisciplinarity. Furthermore, the take on reason and on the outcomes of the struggle and conflict resolution will be much more positive. From Adorno and Horkheimer we can retain the idea of a Critical Theory of the present time and the critique of the instrumental use of

reason as domination of inner instincts, outer nature, and other persons, as well as an incisive non-conformism over against equalization. From the standpoint of conflict, what we can find is a diagnosis of conflict as being completely pervasive: human beings are depicted as being essentially torn between instincts and their repression; as such, human history, and our relation with nature, is a conflictual struggle for domination. But with Habermas and Honneth we will find significant ethical and political applications, as well as a more nuanced take on these matters.

2.1.3 – Habermas: from the discovery of the public sphere to communicative action and the ethics of discussion

Habermas is now one of the most influential thinkers alive. Over the stretch of his long career, he never ceased to reflect and respond to the events of his own time, in different ways. This is still true today, with his critical take on the current events taking place in the European Union and the economic and social crisis of the Western world.⁵⁵² His work is filled with meaningful insights that radically reshaped social theory and domains such as constitutional right, political theory, and even ethics.

Curiously, perhaps his most influential book was the first he wrote, namely, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*.⁵⁵³ In this book Habermas delves into the notion of *Öffentlichkeit* (literally, publicity, but in this context translated as “public sphere”) in order to see how it originated in the European bourgeois societies of the modern period, and how we can see in it an ideal-typical model of democratic practices of deliberation and discussion. The historical accuracy and empirical evidence of the book have been disputed and criticized throughout the years. It has been depicted as idealist and Eurocentric. However, setting aside for the moment being these criticisms, I think we would do well to see in it an ideal-typical reconstruction of a valuable practice, if not an entirely accurate historical depiction. Furthermore, I think that participation in the public sphere is an invaluable instrument in any mature democracy; as such, any

⁵⁵² See Jürgen Habermas, *The Crisis of The European Union. A Response*, translated by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge: Polity, 2012).

⁵⁵³ See Habermas, *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere. An Inquiry into a Category of Bourgeois Society*, translated by Thomas Burguer with the assistance of Frederick Lawrence (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1989).

social philosophy must think about it at some point. In this, Habermas, alongside Arendt, offer us important resources for such a task.

Habermas defines the bourgeois public sphere as “the sphere of private people come together as a public.”⁵⁵⁴ According to him, at a particular juncture in Europe – mainly in countries like England, France and Germany – after the late Middle Ages the conditions were met for a public to appear. This was largely made possible by the existence of shared cultural items, such as novels, which were scarce and all read by the few people who could call themselves a reading public. Later on, people started meeting in salons, and other places to discuss items of potential interest, among them literature and yes, politics. By the 18th century then, something very peculiar had been born. Namely, a sphere in which citizens – by which we understand, bourgeois – could come together and discuss freely, letting the outcome of their discussion be decided by the force of the better argument, and not by status and privilege. This means, Habermas claims, that it was a particular instantiation of civil society that was free from coercion and the exercise of power. No matter how rich or powerful my opponents in the discussion were; if, let me put it this way, reason (or persuasion...) was on my side, I would win the discussion. As such, the only a priori requirement for participating in the debate was the tacit agreement to let oneself be guided by the force of arguments alone. This, in the words of Habermas, constituted a radically democratic situation, a parity “on whose basis alone the authority of the better argument could assert itself”.⁵⁵⁵

As I said, I see in this a powerful ideal-typical model; even a normative model. Of course that being ideal-typical, it might in itself be insufficient to address the complexity of actually existing social conditions. Habermas, like Adorno and Horkheimer before him, deplored the existence of mass culture when he wrote this first book. He eventually argued that at the time when he wrote the book, the public sphere had been degraded to such an extent that people were no longer autonomous. Publicity had become advertisement and manipulation. In our own day, this diagnosis has perhaps to be modulated and nuanced, after the rise of social protest and namely with the radically democratic possibilities opened up by the Internet. And actually he came back to think the issue of the public sphere

⁵⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

more than 30 years later, in *Between Facts and Norms*⁵⁵⁶ where he reshapes his take on the matter.

In this later book, what Habermas is doing is a reactualization of his theory that actually responds to some of the criticisms that had been addressed to him by many readers. One of the main issues concerns the existence of weak publics and strong publics. Another one concerns the plurality of publics. Was there really only *one*, overarching public? Nancy Fraser and other feminists heavily criticized this take. Fraser emphasized⁵⁵⁷, supported by a vast bibliography of revisionist historiography, that Habermas's reconstruction silenced the existence of feminine public spheres and the way in which the male-dominated bourgeois public sphere was constructed upon a number of significant exclusions.⁵⁵⁸ The formal exclusion of women from formal political participation notwithstanding, Mary Ryan, whose study *Women in Public*⁵⁵⁹ Fraser uses extensively to support her claims, has shown that women were able to contribute in various ways to American nineteenth-century political life and that they too constituted a political, albeit non-formal, political arena.

Furthermore, Fraser also claims that what we need are strong publics. That is, we do not only want to discuss matters. We also want that our discussion of matters of public interest be taken into account in political decisions; that is, we want the outcome of the debate to be democratically decided. Habermas concedes that much in *Between Facts and Norms*, and part of his effort consists in a systematization of the ways in which this can happen, that is, the way those who are in the galleries can legitimately influence those who are in the arena of political decision.

To reiterate, the theory of the public sphere and democratic decision-making is, in my opinion, of the utmost importance. But it is, as such, a way of solving conflicts, not of taking them into account. So what was Habermas's take on conflict? This is not entirely clear, and the matter has undergone a certain

⁵⁵⁶ See Habermas, *Between Facts and Norms. Contributions to a Discourse Theory of Law and Democracy* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1996), especially section three of the eight chapter pp. 359-387.

⁵⁵⁷ Nancy Fraser, *Rethinking the Public Sphere: A contribution to the Critique of Actually Existing Democracy*, in *Social Text* 25/26 (1990): 56-80.

⁵⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

⁵⁵⁹ Mary P. Ryan, *Women in Public: Between Banners and Ballots, 1825-1880* (Baltimore: The John Hopkins University Press, 1990).

evolution. We can say, in an oversimplified manner – that is, offering a depiction that is certainly not entirely true but that does indeed correspond to a general movement – that Habermas’s theoretical standpoint evolved from an early Marxism to a later Kantian transcendental standpoint. In the same manner, we can maybe claim that Honneth’s own development was partly a Hegelian backlash against this Kantian overarching influence in Habermas, Rawls and so many others. But setting aside these tags and coming to the more substantive point, the epithets “Marxist” or “Kantian” can also disclose something of the way in which Habermas understood theory, praxis and conflict.

In the early works, such as *Knowledge and Human Interests*⁵⁶⁰ and *Theory and Practice*⁵⁶¹ Habermas still admitted to a huge influence of Marx. *Theory and Practice* is a collection of Habermas’s early texts from the 1960s and its tone is indeed Marxist-Hegelian. It is in this book that he recovers the early Hegel’s Jena writings and reads them emphasizing the aspects of labor and interaction as I recalled in part one. It is also in this book that we find the denunciation of technique and science as being ideological, and also a first attempt to define what would be communicative action. This effort would be further elaborated in *Knowledge and Human Interests*, where we find Habermas’s first systematic grounding of this notion. Habermas’s standpoint needs to be grasped against the backdrop of Adorno and Horkheimer’s own denunciation of instrumental reason.

In *Knowledge and Human Interests* Habermas distinguishes between what he names three “knowledge-constitutive” interests of reason itself. These are, respectively, the interest in technical control⁵⁶², that is, an instrumental use of reason; a “practical interest”⁵⁶³ tied to the goal of comprehension or interpretation and which Habermas attributes to the “cultural sciences” and namely to hermeneutics; finally, an “emancipatory interest” that Habermas traces back to Fichte⁵⁶⁴ but which he wants to extract from idealism and, reinterpreting it in materialist terms⁵⁶⁵, make it the goal of critical social sciences.⁵⁶⁶

⁵⁶⁰ See Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, translated by Jeremy J. Shapiro (Boston: Beacon Press, 1971).

⁵⁶¹ Habermas, *Theory and Practice*, translated by John Viertel (Boston: Beacon Press, 1974).

⁵⁶² Habermas, *Knowledge and Human Interests*, p. 135.

⁵⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

⁵⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 211.

Part of the importance of Habermas's assessment resides in the way he significantly connects but also departs from Adorno and Horkheimer's standpoint. That is, at this point in time, he recognizes and criticizes instrumental action – namely with his critique of work and his denunciation of scientism – but he refuses to deplete the significance of action, or reason, to their instrumental use. Instead, he chooses to emphasize the intersubjective processes of self-formation through work and interaction and his conclusion is that besides instrumental action there is also an alternative mode of interaction: namely communicative action. One of his strongest assertions is that communicative action is irreducible to the framework of instrumental action.⁵⁶⁷ This type of action is then defined as an “unconstrained consensus grounded on a type of “open intersubjectivity”.”⁵⁶⁸ And if he still retains a Marxist standpoint, in that he clearly identifies emancipation as a practical goal, he criticizes Marx for having understood his own philosophy with the model of natural science.⁵⁶⁹ His model, in this early phase, consisted in a rejection of the positivistic tendencies of natural science and what he sees as the shortcomings of hermeneutics (one of the points with which Ricœur would most strongly disagree) and to see the critical social sciences as striving for emancipation at both a theoretical and a practical level; and this because they try to escape both dogmatism and domination through an effort of self-reflection. Adopting a stance that would find a significant echo in the Ricœur of the 1960s he uses Freudian psychoanalysis as an example of such emancipatory procedures, in that it aims to overcome a pathological situation of distorted communication and transform it into a situation where real communicative action can take place.⁵⁷⁰ Consequently, and like Ricœur, he also sees in the psychoanalytical therapeutic relationship some sort of cure through mutual recognition.

This was, of course, only an early attempt at grounding his fundamental notion of communicative action. His model would be refined in the following decades, leading up to the complex and encompassing proposal he puts forward in the 1980s in his *Theory of Communicative Action*.⁵⁷¹ In the transition to this phase,

⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 62.

⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

⁵⁷¹ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume I. Reason and the Rationalization of Society*, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) and *The Theory of*

Habermas undertook what many have called a “linguistic turn”. In its broad scope, it is perhaps his most systematic take on action and rationality, while it is also an exercise of what he calls “postmetaphysical thinking” and an enquiry into the meaning of modernity, both topics to which he would dedicate separate books⁵⁷² in the aftermath of the *Theory of Communicative Action*.

It should be noted that in the 1970s Habermas became interested in the potentialities of language and the analyzes thereof. Like many others, he was fascinated by ordinary language philosophy and namely speech act theory. The *Theory of Communicative Action* is an attempt to put forward a meaningful depiction of intersubjective social action as a theoretical alternative to systems theory, and also a take on rationality that aims at systematically unveiling its potentially positive traits. But in order to formally ground the possibility of communication, he had to delve into the communicative procedures needed to make sure the process is successful. As such, he developed a formal pragmatics so that he could capture the elements which, present in ordinary language and its everyday use, could lead to conventions and norms. As Lasse Thomassen makes clear, when Habermas looks at the illocutionary aspect of language he is aiming at unveiling those conventions that contain a normative force that lead us to emancipation, through the use of reason by *linguistic means*. Thus Thomassen: “That is, he wants to show that we cannot but orient ourselves towards mutual understanding when we communicate; or, by virtue of the very structure of language, we are aiming towards consensus.”⁵⁷³

This means that Habermas’s theory at this point is universalist in its scope; indeed, at the forefront of his reflection stands the possibility of universal validity. A claim must be tied to reasons, and these reasons are criticizable. The claim can be attacked in what concerns its truth, sincerity or legitimacy.⁵⁷⁴ But whatever happens, validity claims cannot be rejected or accepted without reasons.

Communicative Action, Volume 2. Lifeworld and System: A Critique of Functionalist Reason, translated by Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987).

⁵⁷² See Habermas, *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity*, *op. cit.* and Habermas, *Postmetaphysical Thinking*, translated by William Mark Hohengarten (Cambridge, Mass.; The M.I.T. Press, 1992).

⁵⁷³ See Lasse Thomassen, *Habermas: A Guide for the Perplexed* (London: Continuum, 2010), p. 64.

⁵⁷⁴ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 2*, p. 26.

And because these reasons are intersubjectively grounded, they are seen as binding the partners in interaction and to gear them towards consensus and cooperation:

So long as in their speech acts raise claims to the validity of what is being uttered, they are proceeding in the expectation that they can achieve a rationally motivated agreement and can coordinate their plans and actions on this basis-without having to influence the empirical motives of the others through force or the prospect of reward, as is the case with simple impositions and the threat of consequences.⁵⁷⁵

Now, where is the prospect of conflict in all this? Habermas analyzes, on the one hand, what he calls the “lifeworld” of everyday interactions and, on the other hand, the rationalization or even potential colonization of the lifeworld by other modes of coordination such as money and power. The lifeworld provides the meaningful contexts that make a certain pre-understanding possible, especially through shared traditions and conventions. However, modernity processes and what Weber called the disenchantment of the world brought about post-conventional societies where these shared pre-understandings are scarcer, even though the possibility of universal understanding is contained in language and the linguistification of the world itself. As such, the possibility of disagreement is indeed real and it evidently poses challenges to the mode of coordination understood as communicative action. This will lead us directly to what Habermas calls discussion (or argumentation, or discourse). It will be argumentation that will avoid, when disagreements or conflicts take place, the use of power or force to settle the dispute:

Thus the rationality proper to the communicative practice of everyday life points to the practice of argumentation as a court of appeal that makes it possible to continue communicative action with other means when disagreements can no longer be repaired with everyday routines and yet are not to be settled by the direct or strategic use of force.⁵⁷⁶

The point to emphasize is that, according to Habermas, agreement or disagreement are based on reasons that participants supposedly or actually have at their

⁵⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁵⁷⁶ Habermas, *The Theory of Communicative Action, Volume 1*, pp. 17-18.

disposal.⁵⁷⁷ I cannot help noting, and Habermas himself admitted it, that this is a somewhat idealized depiction. Indeed, it is an attempt at a rational reconstruction of a normative process which, in actual practice, we are not sure whether or not actually takes place. It is in this sense that Habermas speaks about an “ideal speech situation” which, nonetheless, is not tantamount to a concrete form of life.⁵⁷⁸

Indeed, one of the peculiar developments in Habermas’s standpoint is his evolution towards an almost purely procedural approach. Since his standpoint is universalist he becomes increasingly concerned with the formal properties of principles and practices, because he needs these practices to be context-transcending: “Only values that can be abstracted and generalized into principles, internalized largely as formal principles, and applied procedurally, have so intensive a power to orient action that they can cut across various particular situations and, in the extreme case, systematically penetrate all spheres of life.”⁵⁷⁹ His is thus a procedural theory of rationality that stems from his own diagnosis asserting that all substantial (and monological) concepts of reason have been critically dissolved.⁵⁸⁰

To sum up, this take is universalist, proceduralist, counter-factual, normative and regulative. As such, it runs the risk of losing some descriptive grasp in virtue of its own normative emphasis. But it can indeed be a suitable ethical standpoint. Allow me to very briefly mention the way the theory of communication action eventually leads to his discourse ethics, before turning to the critiques addressed to Habermas and the insufficiencies of his model to grasp some levels of conflict.

With his *Discourse Ethics*⁵⁸¹ of the 1990s Habermas takes the ultimate step towards proceduralism. In his preface, and assuming a position that is antithetical to Ricœur’s own standpoint in *Oneself as Another*, he asserts the primacy of the just over the good; that is, he assumes that his take is purely deontological.⁵⁸² And why is this? Because he is basically refusing to ground

⁵⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 115.

⁵⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 405.

⁵⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 171-172.

⁵⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁵⁸¹ Habermas, *Justification and Application. Remarks on Discourse Ethics*, translated by Ciaran Cronin (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1994).

⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, p. vii.

ethics on substantive notions. He puts forward a proposal of a postmetaphysical, postconventional morality (and a postconventional type of conscience too) where individuals are not guided by practices and customs stemming from tradition but rather strive to be autonomous and follow moral norms that must pass the test of generalization and be to adhered by everyone. At this stage, as we can easily understand, the Kantian inspiration is blatant.

It is also at this point that Habermas tries to tackle in a more serious manner the problem of conflict. Against the backdrop of a discussion of the Aristotelian standpoint and the making of life plans and the qualification of actions as being good, he comes across the possibility of interpersonal conflict. And when he does, he sees this possibility as one where strategic action is deployed. As such, he argues that in order for this to be considered as a *moral* problem (and thus, ultimately solved by moral means) agents have to submit their maxims to the old Kantian universalization test:

In strategic action, the participants assume that each decides egocentrically in accordance with his own interests. Given these premises, there exists from the beginning at least a latent conflict between adversaries. This can be played out or curbed and brought under control; it can also be resolved in the mutual interest of all concerned. But without a radical shift in perspective and attitude, an interpersonal conflict cannot be perceived by those involved *as* a moral problem. (...) Someone who raises the issue of its permissibility is posing (...) the moral question of whether we all could will that anyone in my situation should act in accordance with the same maxim.⁵⁸³

The regulation of interpersonal conflicts of action is thus, for Habermas, a properly moral (not ethical in the Aristotelian sense) issue. One of the goals of this effort of practical reason will therefore be to grasp “the just resolution of a conflict in the realm of norm-regulated action”.⁵⁸⁴ In another formulation, he tells us that morality is concerned with the “norms according to which we want to live together and of how practical conflicts can be settled in the common interest of all”.⁵⁸⁵

However, all this talk on conflict notwithstanding, does Habermas *really* take it into account in a sufficient manner? And even if he does, does his solution

⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 6.

⁵⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

really succeed at doing away with conflict? First of all, he attempts to resort to the “standpoint of impartial judgment”⁵⁸⁶ which is evidently problematic; it is not clear whether or not such an impartial judgment on human matters exists at all, let alone the possibility of assuming it for oneself. Secondly, his emphasis is more on consensus than on conflict as such. This would lead to many critiques.

Indeed, Habermas sees society as a locus of cooperation and mutual understanding. In a way, he posits the existence of consensus both at the beginning and end of human interaction. At the beginning, because the lifeworld is based on processes of prior mutual understanding; at the end because, when people engage in a discussion and put forward claims that they wish the other recognize as valid, they also do so in the hope of reaching an agreement, provided that their motivations are not merely strategic. One of Habermas’s goals is to prove that rationalization is not intrinsically a totally negative process and, at the same time, that a society totally regulated by systems and strategic action would be untenable. But it should be asked if his ideal of fully eliminating them is not also, as such, untenable. Thus J. Donald Moon argued that a moral community fully founded on a proceduralist basis, one which would fully eliminate conflict, is impossible in societies characterized by value pluralism.⁵⁸⁷

A second line of questioning could be an assessment of whether or not Habermas is sufficiently taking into account the actually existing conflicts in the societies he pretends to be analyzing. Many critics have indeed raised objections concerning the inadequacy of Habermas’s account to grasp conflicts, or indeed the capacity of his model to provide a just resolution of conflicts, which is something he allegedly tries to do. Moon, for instance, further claims that the agonistic dimension of our moral and political lives might be irreducible: “Without abandoning the demand for impartiality, we must also acknowledge that there may be deep conflicts of values which preclude agreement on norms that all could accept.”⁵⁸⁸ This claim would be present in a whole host of critics to both Habermas and Rawls, from the feminist critiques of Seyla Benhabib to the communitarian standpoint of Walzer. Furthermore, neo-Aristotelian emphases on the substantive good versus the procedural right, such as those put forward by

⁵⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁵⁸⁷ J. Donald Moon, “Practical discourse and communicative ethics” in *The Cambridge Companion to Habermas*, edited by Stephen K. White (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1995), p. 144.

⁵⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

Charles Taylor, Alasdair MacIntyre and yes, Paul Ricœur, also attacked the possibility of a purely procedural theory of justice. This will only find a solution, in my opinion, in an ethics and politics of mutual recognition. At the end of this part we will see how Ricœur himself tries to provide a solution for this problem, in the context of the debate between universalism and contextualism.

The occlusion of conflict and even a certain descriptive deficit in Habermas's social theory has also been noted by some of the best readers of Habermas, such as Honneth and David Ingram. Commenting on Habermas's ideal of argumentation and noting that it is a question of "right, rather than might", Ingram proposes to reverse the question:

What – if anything – is realistic about that ideal? Critical theorists emphasize the importance of grounding their ideals in the understanding of real social agents. But how accurately do these ideals track these understandings?⁵⁸⁹

Ingram argues that Habermas's model runs up against the inherent context-dependency of meaning; consequently, to devise an ideal model of argumentation and to expect that it hopefully can find some application in different contexts is partially misleading⁵⁹⁰ because it is a betrayal of the principle of letting these social contexts themselves inform us of the several ways in which they function. Moreover, he claims that we cannot neglect the role power plays in these different contexts. Ultimately, Ingram concludes that Habermas's theory of argumentation is too optimistic in what comes down to both the possibility and even desirability of applying its ideal to all contexts of institutionalized research.⁵⁹¹ He argues that in many contexts, in order to resolve conflict, a partial "strategic" compromise, rather than a full consensus, is perhaps the only way to solve or mitigate conflicts.

Axel Honneth, for his part, adopted a critique of Habermas as an inspiration for his early theoretical endeavors. Indeed, his first book, *The Critique of Power*⁵⁹², was an attempt to ground his own notion of a critical social theory in the idea of struggle that both sought inspiration but also heavily criticized

⁵⁸⁹ See David Ingram, *Habermas. Analysis and Introduction* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 2010) p. 146.

⁵⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁵⁹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 149-150.

⁵⁹² Axel Honneth, *The Critique of Power. Reflective Stages in a Critical Social Theory*, translated by Kenneth Baynes (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1991).

Foucault's analyzes of power relations and Habermas's take on communicative action. However, probably the most important article on his assessment of Habermas's model is, as Jean-Philippe Deranty has duly noted⁵⁹³, the 1981 article "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination" republished in *Disrespect*.⁵⁹⁴ In this article, Honneth rejects the diagnosis according to which class struggle had been deactivated. He traces back this diagnosis from Adorno and Marcuse to Habermas. According to Honneth, they had all lost faith on a morality that might arise from socio structural conflicts.⁵⁹⁵

Why did this happen, according to Honneth? Because, in his view, Adorno, Marcuse and Habermas all saw the interests of the wage-earning class to have diverted onto private consumption.⁵⁹⁶ At this point, he explicitly turns towards a critique of Habermas's depiction of late capitalism. He claims that Habermas's theory of society systematically ignores "all forms of existing social critique not recognized by the political-hegemonic public sphere"⁵⁹⁷ and that "a field of moral-practical conflicts may lie hidden behind the façade of late capitalist integration, in which old class conflicts continue to take place either in socially controlled or in highly individualized forms."⁵⁹⁸ I am not sure whether or not Honneth's claim was correct in 1981. But I am persuaded that this diagnosis from the 1980s is precise today, with the new struggles and protests taking place in the Western developed world in the aftermath of the 2007-2009 crisis.

What is the problem with Habermas's model? It consists in the following: by insisting that the procedural ethics of discourse only deals with normative claims, he risks overlooking all the "potentialities for moral action which have not reached the level of elaborated value judgments".⁵⁹⁹ That is, we might add, Habermas overlooks all those embodied relevant moral events (of acceptance, rejection, suffering, and so forth) that do not reach the threshold of coherent discursive articulation and thus never become rational claims for normative

⁵⁹³ See Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Beyond Communication. A Critical Study of Axel Honneth's Social Philosophy* (Leiden: Brill, 2009), pp. 98-102.

⁵⁹⁴ Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination: Some Problems in the Analysis of Hidden Morality" in *Disrespect. The Normative Foundations of Critical Theory* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2007), pp. 80-96.

⁵⁹⁵ Honneth, "Moral Consciousness and Class Domination", p. 81.

⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

validity. Honneth's move then is to look for "securely anchored feelings of injustice" that could be a complement to ethically grounded and discursively articulated goals. Honneth's conclusion in this article is that a "critical analysis of society must see as its task today the identification of moral conflicts connected to the social class structure which are hidden behind late capitalism's façade of integration".⁶⁰⁰ This kind of "hidden morality" is to be found, according to Honneth, in the experiences of underground resistance. It is a "consciousness of injustice"⁶⁰¹ which many times lies below the threshold of publicly recognized normative conflict but that is not, for that fact, non-existent. His self-professed goal at that point in time would therefore be to shed some light on the "socially repressed moral conflicts"⁶⁰² without, however, being able to do so in the context of his short article. But this will be exactly what he would try to do in the two decades to follow.

These criticisms by Honneth expose some of the fragilities of Habermas's social model. Jean-Philippe Deranty, one of the best interpreters of Honneth's social philosophy sees in Honneth's early theoretical model a direct response to Habermas and an attempt to go beyond the linguistification of critical social theory and beyond the paradigm of communication.⁶⁰³ One of the earliest and probably the best collection of critical essays on Habermas's *Theory of Communicative Action* has in fact been organized by Honneth, in collaboration with Hans Joas.⁶⁰⁴ I will take a better look at how he proposes an alternative to communicative action as a paradigm for social theory in the next section, which is dedicated to Honneth.

Ricœur, for his part, also accompanied and sometimes incorporated and criticized Habermas's writings, especially at the critical juncture of the 1970s, when he was himself particularly interested in the hermeneutics of action and in several matters pertaining to social philosophy, like the social imaginary. In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* Ricœur dedicates two chapters to Habermas and namely to his *Knowledge and Human Interests*. These chapters are mainly dedicated to the topic of ideology in Habermas, because this is the core of

⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 90-91.

⁶⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 94.

⁶⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 95.

⁶⁰³ Jean-Philippe Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, pp. 109-117.

⁶⁰⁴ *Communicative Action. Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action*, edited by Axel Honneth and Hans Joas and translated by Jeremy Gaines and Doris L. Jones (Cambridge, Mass.: M.I.T. Press, 1991).

Ricœur's book. He is particularly interested in seeing how this notion survives in unorthodox Post-Marxist theory, and namely in Critical Theory. It would be out of the scope of this chapter to delve into Ricœur's analysis of ideology in the theory of Habermas; however, he also includes, in passing, some comments on Habermas's standpoint that are worth mentioning.

Firstly, he mentions the similarities between Habermas's standpoint and his own project in the 1960s, namely, the recovery of Freudian psychoanalysis in the context of a theory of interpretation and a refusal to oppose interpretation and explanation.⁶⁰⁵ However, he assumes a particular interest in the debate that took place between Gadamer and Habermas⁶⁰⁶, and this for obvious reasons. I mentioned how Habermas at this stage opposed the hermeneutical sciences and the critical social sciences. For him, indeed, only the critical social sciences could pursue the interest of reason in emancipation; this interest of reason would, in turn, partly be fulfilled through a critique of ideologies. At this point, he does not really credit the historic-hermeneutical sciences with the capacity to fulfill such a task. However, this is a goal that Ricœur will set for himself. I will leave a more detailed account of Ricœur's critical hermeneutics (and the connection of this with his social philosophy) for parts four and five of this thesis. But I will mention Ricœur's main objection right now:

First, I cannot conceive of a hermeneutics without a critical stage itself. This critical stage is exemplified in the development out of philology of modern structuralism and other objective approaches. Second, the critical sciences are themselves hermeneutical, in the sense that besides tending to enlarge communication they presuppose that the distortions of which they speak are not natural events but processes of desymbolization. The distortions belong to the sphere of communicative action.⁶⁰⁷

Therefore, according to Ricœur, it will be up to action (guided by hermeneutics) to overcome these distinctions. But he downplays both Habermas's distinction between the three types of sciences and his dispute with Gadamer. He sees their dispute as being a political one, and seems not to want this feud to spill over into

⁶⁰⁵ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 229.

⁶⁰⁶ See *Hermeneutik und Ideologiekritik*, Herausgegeben von Jürgen Habermas, Dieter Henrich und Jacob Taubes, mit Beiträgen von Karl-Otto Apel, Claus v. Bormann, Rüdiger Bubner, Hans-Georg Gadamer, Hans Joachim Giegel und Jürgen Habermas (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1971).

⁶⁰⁷ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 236.

theory. What he does seem to take from Habermas is his own use of Freudianism and psychoanalysis as “depth hermeneutics”⁶⁰⁸ which is in tune with Ricœur’s own standpoint in *Freud and Philosophy*. However, he also offers a caution regarding the comparison between the critique of ideologies and the psychoanalytical relation. Indeed, he notes that psychoanalysis and the critique of ideologies have different criteria of success.⁶⁰⁹ Consequently, he claims that the parallelism can only go so far; namely, there is nothing in ideology critique compared to the relation between patient and physician⁶¹⁰ except perhaps if we consider the critical theorist as some sort of doctor of society... but if we do, are we not forgetting the attention that must be directed towards actors themselves rather than to the alleged superior standpoint of the theorist?

Ultimately, Ricœur is interested in putting forward his own notion of utopia over against ideology. And he will do this by using the social imaginary and a hermeneutic theory. In an article precisely called “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology”, republished in both *From Text to Action* and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*⁶¹¹ Ricœur develops his encompassing theoretical alternative that is supposed to go beyond Habermas’s positing of the strict alternative between these two theoretical endeavors. This is a fundamental article, to which I will come back when tackling Ricœur’s social philosophy.

Later, in *Oneself as Another* Ricœur also comes back to assess Habermas’s ethics of discussion and takes it to be, alongside Rawls’s theory of justice, the greatest example of the universalist thesis.⁶¹² He then recaps the debate between universalism and contextualism and praises the effort to solve that debate with the help of an ethics of discussion and argumentation.⁶¹³ Indeed, he sees in the application of an ethic of discussion a better solution than a purely procedural approach (that is, he reads the ethic of discussion as not being purely procedural, which is disputable...) but he criticizes the strategy of purification from conventions, which ultimately makes impossible the contextual mediation.⁶¹⁴ He

⁶⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 239.

⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 249.

⁶¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 247-248.

⁶¹¹ See Ricœur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, edited and translated by John B. Thompson (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981), pp. 63-100.

⁶¹² Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 284.

⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 286.

further notes that in Habermas conventions come to take the place that inclinations had for Kant: they must be extirpated.⁶¹⁵ He thus proposes to substitute the opposition between argumentation and convention for a dialectic between argumentation and conviction which will lead to his moral judgment in situation, some sort of reactualization of the Aristotelian *phronesis*. I will take a closer look at this in part five of this thesis.

By now, I have reconstructed some of the main claims of Habermas's critical theory and discourse theory, including the theory of communicative action. I did not mention his theory of deliberative democracy or his reflections on Europe and constitutional right, for lack of space and pertinence to this chapter. I also mentioned his take on conflict and its difficulties. These criticisms of Habermas's take on conflict and the ultimate shortcomings of his theory notwithstanding, I still want to mention an important aspect of Habermas's theory I haven't mentioned yet. In the second volume of the *Theory of Communicative Action* he describes the interaction between "lifeworld" which is, for him, characterized by daily interactions tending towards mutual agreement, and what he calls "systems". His examples of systems are mainly state and the market, which function through money and power. These systems bear an influence on people's behavior that is ultimately independent of the efforts of communicative action; and Habermas's diagnosis goes so far as to state the potential colonization of the lifeworld by these systems; this would entail a dire social pathology. In fact, this is Habermas's own attempt at explaining reification in late capitalism; for him, reification comes about because of a process of abstraction brought by the media of money and power.

This is even the model case for the colonization of the lifeworld that is behind reification phenomena in advanced capitalist societies. It sets in when the destruction of traditional forms of life can no longer be offset by more effectively fulfilling the functions of society as a whole. The functional ties of money and power media become noticeable only to the degree that elements of a private way of life and a cultural-political form of life get split off from the symbolic structures of the lifeworld through the monetary redefinition of goals, relations and services, lifespaces and life-times, and through the bureaucratization

⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 287.

of decisions, duties and rights, responsibilities and dependencies.⁶¹⁶

This can in turn lead, according to Habermas's depiction, to a loss of meaning; there might be a "bureaucratic desiccation of the political public sphere" when the spheres of the lifeworld are totally invaded by functional imperatives of highly formalized domains.⁶¹⁷ The bureaucratization and monetarization of everyday practices can thus have a destructive effect.⁶¹⁸ Now, this caution indeed strikes me as being fundamental, and it would have a confirmation, as well as positive formulation, in the positing of the heterogeneity of social goods and the need to avoid both monopoly and dominance of one good over the others in Michael Walzer's theory of justice, which I will mention in the next chapter. But let me now turn to the third generation of Critical Theory, and namely to Axel Honneth. With Honneth, whose influence in this thesis is everywhere patent, we find a model where conflict and struggle are granted a fundamental importance.

2.1.4 – Honneth and the struggle for recognition

I mention Axel Honneth and his core idea of the struggle for recognition⁶¹⁹ many times in this thesis. We have already seen in part one how he systematically reconstructs Hegel's tripartite model of intersubjective recognition of the Jena period, and in the last section I mentioned how he partially took the inspiration for his early theoretical endeavors from a critique of Habermas's model of communication for social theory. Now I will dedicate a few pages to thematically analyzing his own theoretical proposals and their significance both for social theory and for conflict theory. I will end this section with a short excursus on how his social model might benefit from the intersection with other,

⁶¹⁶ Habermas, *Theory of Communicative Action*, p. 322.

⁶¹⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 325.

⁶¹⁹ Over the last few years I have presented the idea of Honneth's struggle for recognition, mainly by comparing it with other similar projects on recognition, such as Taylor's or Ricœur's, in several articles. This section develops some of the ideas already contained in, for instance, Gonçalo Marcelo. "Consciência Moral e Reivindicação Social: em torno do paradigma do reconhecimento, in *Actas das Primeiras Jornadas Internacionais de Jovens Investigadores de Filosofia* (2009), available on-line at: http://www.krisis.uevora.pt/edicao/separatas_1JJIJF/Goncalo_MARCELO.pdf and Gonçalo Marcelo, "Paul Ricœur and the Utopia of Mutual Recognition" in *Études Ricoeuriennes/Ricœur Studies* 2,1 (2011): 110-133., available on-line at <http://ricoeur.pitt.edu/ojs/index.php/ricoeur/article/view/69>.

more strictly philosophical depictions of conflict, such as those put forward by Lyotard and Rancière. But first let me give a brief overview of how his social theory unfolded.

In *The Critique of Power*, the book that stems from his doctoral thesis, Honneth aims at assessing the social models of both Habermas and Foucault. He starts off by analyzing the deficits of Adorno and Horkheimer's take on social action, arguing that because they believed in a totalized model of the domination of nature, they were unable to grasp the specific dimension of intersubjective interaction.⁶²⁰ Accordingly, he sees in Habermas and Foucault two meaningful attempts to grasp the specifically social element of human interaction albeit from opposing standpoints: Foucault recovers the paradigm of struggle and domination from a system-theoretic viewpoint⁶²¹, while Habermas explores the possibility of mutual understanding.⁶²² From the analysis and ultimately the critique of these two standpoints and their shortcomings, Honneth tries to put forward his own critique of power, which is both aimed at grasping the element of social domination and the critique thereof, but not from a systems-theoretic point of view.

Deranty emphasizes how Honneth, in this book, considers that Habermas had lost sight of the problem of power and its maldistribution.⁶²³ Foucault, on the other hand, was considered as having had the merit of bringing back struggle as a key element for understanding the social world. He emphasizes how Foucault allows us to grasp the "twin dispositions of 'power' and 'desire' in which discourse, portrayed precisely as an omnipresent stream of linguistic events, is an object of strategic conflict."⁶²⁴ He follows the thread of Foucault's argument, from the pinpointing of the motivations of conflict to the depiction of social systems "as networks of social power in which knowledge formations assume the special

⁶²⁰ See Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, chapter three "Adorno's Theory of Society: The definitive Repression of the Social", pp. 57-96.

⁶²¹ *Ibid.*, chapters 5 "From the Analysis of Discourse to the Theory of Power: Struggle as the Paradigm of the Social", pp. 149-175 and 6 "Foucault's Theory of Society: A Systems-Theoretic Dissolution of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment*", pp. 176-202.

⁶²² *Ibid.*, chapters 8 "Two Competing Models of the History of the Species: Understanding as the Paradigm of the Social", pp. 240-277 and 9 "Habermas' Theory of Society: A Transformation of the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of the Theory of Communication", pp. 278-303.

⁶²³ Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 92.

⁶²⁴ Honneth, *The Critique of Power*, p. 151.

function of augmenting power”⁶²⁵ and from that to the ultimate diagnosis according to which the order of knowledge is transformed into an order of social power.⁶²⁶ What interests Honneth, however, is Foucault’s depiction of the diversity of power relations. The exercise of power is “an open-ended product of strategic conflicts between subjects” that leads to “a continuous struggle of social actors among themselves”.⁶²⁷ This is, somehow, a diagnosis of society as a locus of perpetual battle, reminiscent of Hobbes. One of the particularities of Foucault, however, is that he maintains that this happens in modern societies in a variety of different occasions, and not necessarily centralized by a state apparatus; this leads him to his project of a “microphysics of power”.⁶²⁸ Power, in turn, expresses itself in a variety of manners, from physical violence to ideological manipulation. Honneth ultimately concludes that Foucault falls back into a “fundamentally reductionistic idea of a one-sided rule of force”⁶²⁹ because he excludes the possibility of an overcoming of the situation of struggle.⁶³⁰ Indeed, social institutions come to appear as a means to exercise force. Accordingly, for Honneth, this will deprive social actors of the significance of their action among the plurality of conflict situations. Moreover, as would become clear in the *Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth argues that norms are not in themselves illegitimate uses of force and power (as Foucault seems to contend) and that the struggle is many times motivated by moral reasons.

The topic of power and asymmetric power-relations will not be as important in the rest of Honneth’s work as it was in these early years. But there is indeed a possible complementarity between the theory of recognition (understood as the positive reciprocal acceptance or appreciation among social actors) and the analysis of asymmetric power-relations and forms of subjectivation and subjectivity-formation inspired by Foucault. This lead has been followed, among others⁶³¹, by Judith Butler. Misrecognition and power can in fact be closely tied

⁶²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 152.

⁶²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 153.

⁶²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

⁶²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

⁶³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 174

⁶³¹ This topic has been explored, in strict connection with the work of Honneth, in the collective book *Recognition and Power. Axel Honneth and the Tradition of Critical Social Theory*, edited by Bert van den Brink and David Owen (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007). In this book, see especially the article by Veit Bader, “Misrecognition, Power and Democracy”, pp. 238-270.

together, and a positive struggle for recognition needs to take that aspect into account.

As Jean-Philippe Deranty contends, the *Struggle for Recognition* can be seen as the positive attempt to further develop some intuitions already formulated negatively in the *Critique of Power*, namely, the struggle for recognition is Honneth's proposal of "what a new 'philosophy of praxis' maintaining the theory of class struggle should look like".⁶³² In the first book Honneth undertakes an immanent reconstruction of critique as it was understood in the Frankfurt School, showing how the "reflective stages" of prior critical theorists in a way lead to his own social model. Accordingly, the idea of a social theory that simultaneously recognizes the centrality of conflict in social life but grants actors the effective agency to liberate themselves from oppressing structures and damaged social relations, and grounds all of this in moral reasons, is precisely what Honneth would put forward in the most fundamental of his early books.

I already mentioned the first chapters of the *Struggle for Recognition* in my chapter on Hegel in part one. What I want to briefly recap now is Honneth's hugely influential reconstruction of the tripartite model of recognition in the particular mix of Hegel's philosophy and George Herbert Mead's social philosophy, and his proposal to grasp social evolution through the angle of the struggle for recognition.

In a way, the idea to explain progress through the struggle for recognition is not new. As we have seen in the chapter on Hegel, Kojève undertook a similar effort. However, as we also mentioned in that chapter, Kojève's take was ultimately individualistic, based in the *Phenomenology of Spirit* and its model of consciousness-formation and, even if it was constructed for political purposes and namely for the striving for emancipation, it was ultimately focused on asymmetrical relations of recognition and depicted recognition as an intrinsically violent and negative process, i.e., one that should be overcome.

Honneth's description is radically different from Kojève's. Indeed, for him, recognition will be an essentially positive feature or, as Charles Taylor puts it, "a vital human need".⁶³³ However, he also emphasizes the possibility of denial

⁶³² Deranty, *Beyond Communication*, p. 125.

⁶³³ Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, edited by Amy Gutmann (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1994), p. 26.

of recognition (what he sometimes calls disrespect, but that can also assume the forms of social invisibility⁶³⁴ or reification⁶³⁵) but when he does he also systematically puts forward the possibility that social actors recover due recognition by exercising resistance and struggle. The result of this approach is a real social model of conflict, with both descriptive and normative content, and ultimately aiming at political goals. These goals are maybe not assumed by Honneth himself in the role of theoretician, but they have been forcefully put forward by some of his best interpreters, like Jean Philippe-Deranty and Emmanuel Renault⁶³⁶ and Honneth admits that as social theorists we have the duty to defend the best practices in terms of moral progress; if we do that, or so the claim implicitly goes, citizens can then use these goals in political terms.⁶³⁷ As such, in my opinion, Honneth's social philosophy offers precisely what was missing in Habermas's social theory: a powerful and encompassing model to grasp the significance of social conflict.

In chapters four, five and six of *The Struggle for Recognition* Honneth puts forward his systematic renewal of the tripartite model of recognition. In order to do so in strictly postmetaphysical terms, he resorts to Mead's social psychology. Mead allows him to develop an intersubjectivistic model of consciousness-formation: "a subject can only acquire a consciousness of itself to the extent to which it learns to perceive its own action from the symbolically represented second-person perspective".⁶³⁸ He follows this lead and connects it with Hegel's notion of the development of a "practical relation to self" which is reflexively mediated, that is, dependent on the recognition of others. Mead's distinction between the "I" and the "me" and between the "generalized other" and the "significant other" alongside Donald Winnicott's theory of object relations and child development provide Honneth with a model to understand how one's development and self-realization is intrinsically dependent on the meaningful

⁶³⁴ Axel Honneth, "Invisibility": On the Epistemology of Recognition" in *The Aristotelian Society Supplementary Volume* 75,1 (2011): 111-126.

⁶³⁵ Honneth, *Reification*, *op. cit.*

⁶³⁶ See Jean Philippe-Deranty and Emmanuel Renault, "Politicizing Honneth's Ethics of Recognition" in *Thesis Eleven* 88 (2007): 92-111. See also my interview with Emmanuel Renault, Gonalo Marcelo et Emmanuel Renault, "Reconnaissance, Critique Sociale et Politique", *op. cit.*, pp. 142-143.

⁶³⁷ See his interview with me, Gonalo Marcelo, "Recognition and Critical Theory Today. An interview with Axel Honneth", *op. cit.*: 214.

⁶³⁸ Honneth, *The Struggle for Recognition*, p. 75.

interaction with others and mainly with one's "significant others", that is, those that really count for us.

As such, Honneth's argumentation follows a double strategy, as his argument is put forward both in categorial and psychological / sociological terms. In the fifth chapter he therefore puts forward his systematic proposal of the patterns of intersubjective recognition, namely, love, rights and solidarity. Each of these spheres will be the locus of intersubjective relationships, each of which will garner the potentiality of developing one's positive relation towards oneself. In love, rights and solidarity, the positive feelings of self-confidence, self-respect and self-esteem will thus develop; that is, if the relations of recognition are not systematically distorted or pathologically denied. This can in fact happen, and indeed thus do happen in many cases of what Honneth calls "disrespect". If relationships of recognition unfold in primary relationships of love and friendship (love), legal relations (rights) and communities of value that grant esteem (solidarity), then the experiences of disrespect such as abuse, denial of rights, exclusion, or denigration and insult can compromise one's physical or social integrity, or one's dignity.⁶³⁹ In this matter, Honneth argues from a normative point of view. He claims that "every subject is free from being collectively denigrated, so that one is given the chance to experience oneself to be recognized, in light of one's own accomplishments and abilities, as valuable for society."⁶⁴⁰

This means that everyone has a legitimate claim for recognition. If, in order to develop a healthy life, I need to be recognized at a personal level, and I need to have my rights and value recognized, if, in other terms, people do not go through life solipsistically ignoring others' opinion and attitude towards them, then the consequences of the denial of recognition are dire. When faced with insult, humiliation, denial of rights and so forth human beings are exposed in their constitutive fragility. When the case is very serious (consider, for instance, physical rape) it can result in one's feeling of loss of reality⁶⁴¹ and even threaten to dissolve one's own subjectivity. These types of degradations can be detected by the social theorist by interpreting symptoms such as "the sort of negative

⁶³⁹ See the table on page 129 of *The Struggle for Recognition* for the correspondence between modes of recognition and modes of disrespect.

⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.* p. 130.

⁶⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

emotional reactions expressed in feelings of social shame”.⁶⁴² Now, of course, this can have several outcomes. If the pathology inflicted on social agents is too deep, people might never recover, or they can even never be able to articulate their sorrows or claims for justice. However,

Should actions guided by norms be repelled by situations because the norms taken to be valid are violated, this leads to “moral” conflicts in the social lifeworld.⁶⁴³

Why is conflict the key to understand this process? Because victims of social abuse, like xenophobia, racism, denigration, bullying and so on might revolt against their oppressors and eventually resist. Of course that resistance might be individual but Honneth proposes to analyze societal development in terms of moral progress through collective conflict. When faced with disrespect, individuals can develop a feeling of indignation. But the conditions to resist will be improved if an individual becomes aware that his or her own situation might be typical for an entire group. If that happens, it just might be that the individual experiences of suffering and disrespect articulate and transmit themselves in such a way that they are understood by other people as also affecting them. Honneth thus speaks about a “semantic bridge between the impersonal aspirations of a social movement and their participants’ private experiences of injury, a bridge that is sturdy enough to enable the development of collective identity”.⁶⁴⁴

As such, the violation of deeply rooted expectations regarding recognition can become the motivation for collective organization and resistance. In order for this to work, however, the conditions must be met for a shared semantics to encompass the members of the group:

Hurt feelings of this sort can, however, become the motivational basis for collective resistance only if subjects are able to articulate them within an intersubjective framework of interpretation that they can show to be typical for an entire group. In this sense, the emergence of social movements hinges on the existence of a shared semantics that enables

⁶⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 137.

⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

personal experiences of disappointment to be interpreted as something affecting not just the individual himself or herself but also a circle of many other subjects.⁶⁴⁵

This emphasis on shared semantics allows Honneth to partially recover Habermas's insistence on communication, while at the same time arguing that it is conflict in society that will bring about a better situation. Whether or not this semantics is totally or only partially shared is not even an important point. What is needed is not an ideal speech situation, but rather a common agreement regarding the existence of an evil (insult, denigration, formal exclusion of rights, or whatever it is) that poses a common threat and which, therefore, needs to be removed.

How to remove it is then a different problem but I will later argue that engaging in a conflict of interpretations – a process, after all, inspired by Ricœur – is an important way to try to overcome misrecognition. Honneth ends his book putting forward a “formal conception of ethical life”, that is, something more substantive than Kantian “thin” morality and the procedural theories that emphasize the deontological moment over and above the substantive good life. His whole theory can thus be seen as pointing out the necessary conditions for individual self-realization. And his whole take on the history of Western societies since the Enlightenment can be seen as a partial march towards a broadening of the spheres of recognition (for instance: social groups such as women increasingly saw their rights of democratic participation recognized). His standpoint is therefore a particular mix of optimism and realism. That is, he is confident that we tend, or at least can or should tend, towards the *telos* of a society whose members are duly recognized. But he does not ignore that in order for this to happen what is needed is a transformation of culture “so as to radically expand relations of solidarity”.⁶⁴⁶ He does not ignore that we might fail to attain such a goal. He does not have a systematic philosophy of history, such as Hegel's, that would allow him to be certain of the desired outcome. And he is indeed “politically agnostic” in the *Struggle for Recognition* in that he refuses to determine what specific political shape such a future society could assume. But he is realistic in his acknowledgment of the importance of conflict in this process. Indeed, in the last sentence of his book, he qualifies this matter as “no longer a matter for theory but

⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 163-164.

⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

rather for the future of social struggles”.⁶⁴⁷ That is, he does not expect societies to eventually reach an overarching consensus on these matters. Rather, he thinks it more likely that social groups defend their interests (for moral reasons) and that, through that social struggle, the desired outcome of a more just, solidary and non-discriminatory society ensues.

Consequently, what we find in Axel Honneth’s recognition-theoretical social model is a conflict theory with normative and moral grounding. In its grasp, it is almost as encompassing as Marx’s social theory but without, however, the deterministic consequences and also more geared to cultural and moral motivations than strictly economic ones. The impact of Honneth’s theory of recognition, alongside other recoveries of Hegelian recognition such as Charles Taylor’s or partially non-Hegelian appraisals of recognition such as Ricœur’s, has had a deep influence in both political philosophy and sociology in France, Germany and the United States. His emphasis on conflict has also been given much attention, even if some political philosophers such as Robin Celikates argue that Honneth could have been gone further in his analysis of conflicts. In an early article Celikates claims that by putting the struggle for recognition under the banner of a possible reconciliation (even if just as a projected *telos*) Honneth loses sight of some important aspects of social conflict.⁶⁴⁸ In a more recent article, Celikates, together with Georg Bertram in a way go even further than Honneth in explicitly positing a fundamental connection between recognition and what they call “individuals’ capacity for conflict (*Konfliktfähigkeit*)”.⁶⁴⁹ Aiming to go beyond both what they call “positive” and “negative” conceptions of recognition (respectively, those that see recognition as liberating and those that see recognition as oppressing), they argue that any conception of recognition should be grounded in a generative notion of conflict.

Moreover, Bertram and Celikates confirm my claim concerning the essential role of the conflict of interpretations. And they see in Honneth an insufficient place for this essential matter:

⁶⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁶⁴⁸ See Robin Celikates “Nicht versöhnt. Wo bleibt der Kampf im ‘Kampf um Anerkennung’?” in *Socialité et reconnaissance*, edited by Georg Bertram, Robin Celikates, Christophe Laudou and David Lauer (Paris: L’harmattan, 2007), pp. 213-228.

⁶⁴⁹ See Georg W. Bertram and Robin Celikates, “Towards a Conflict Theory of Recognition: On the Constitution of Relations of Recognition in Conflict” in *European Journal of Philosophy* 21,4 (2013): 2, available in early view, doi: 10.1111/ejop.12016.

Honneth bars himself from being able to articulate his negative insight in a positive way. By contrast, a conflictual understanding of recognition must conceive precisely agents' entering into conflicts as acts of recognition that can become the objects of further interpretations and novel negotiations in the course of these conflicts.⁶⁵⁰

These authors go on to argue that conflict is the generative motor of recognitive relations in that in order for these to be established, social actors have to be able to negotiate them through conflict:

Something central and essential becomes intelligible at this juncture: Relations of recognition are established and (con-)tested in and through conflicts. Conflicts cannot be conceived as what drives differentiation, nor merely as what initiates the reinterpretation of norms of recognition and thereby the extension of relations of recognition. Rather, conflicts are interactions between individuals or groups through which relations of recognition are actualized in the first place and must always be constituted anew time and again. Accordingly, relations of recognition are only realized when individuals or groups are capable of negotiating divergent normative claims.⁶⁵¹

This standpoint has the merit of showing a constitutive power of conflict. To be sure, it is not that recognition is a negative phenomenon, or that there cannot be recognition without strife. There certainly can be such a state, at least temporarily. Perhaps in a situation akin to what Ricœur calls the “clearings” of recognition, its “states of peace”. But Bertram and Celikates are right to pinpoint this much: the way recognition unfolds is many times through conflict. When someone puts forward certain claims, when he or she wants to be recognized, there is an inherent call for the recognition of the validity of those claims (as Habermas would put it). And the way this is played out is certainly in a conflictive manner. Argumentation entails contradiction, and contradiction, in turn, leads to a conflict of interpretations.

The force of this reconstruction of relations of recognition through conflict is that even though conflict plays a role, it is not in itself necessarily a negative or pejorative role. These are not asymmetrical relations of recognition as

⁶⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 5.

⁶⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

domination, as they were found in Kojève's standpoint. Rather, there is here a certain "virtue of conflict" – to use Hunyadi's formulation which I will turn to in a moment – because it is conflict that properly constitutes the relations of recognition themselves.

There are other tensions, twists and turns in Honneth's take on recognition, which I will only be able to mention very briefly, for lack of space. For instance, the fact that he makes of the striving for recognition *the* single, overarching motivation for social struggles might in itself be problematic. Nancy Fraser's more nuanced approach, firstly presented under a dual aspect of cultural struggles for recognition and economic struggles for redistribution in her debate with Honneth⁶⁵², and afterwards assuming the shape of a tripartite model where the topic of representation is added to those of recognition and redistribution⁶⁵³, seems best equipped to capture the plurality of motivations driving conflict and struggles among social actors.

I will leave aside many very important aspects of Honneth's theory of recognition, such as a more systematic exploration of the forms the negative deprivation of recognition assume within his theory, as for example the critique of social invisibility, reification, and the whole account of social pathologies. Instead, I will just mention in a very succinct manner the latest developments of his theory of recognition and namely the way in which the mature Honneth is now inspired by the mature Hegel, like the early Honneth was also inspired by the early Hegel.

Indeed, roughly eight years after the publication of *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth began a systematic recovery of Hegel's *Philosophy of Right*. A first systematic attempt to recover it was put forward in *Suffering from Indeterminacy*⁶⁵⁴ and the more recent *Das Recht der Freiheit*, published in 2011, can be seen as an ambitious attempt to ground democratic ethical life in a recovery of Hegel's philosophy of right.

This last book is Honneth's most important publication in twenty years, that is, the single most encompassing book since *The Struggle of Recognition*. It marks the transition from an intersubjective notion of recognition grounded on

⁶⁵² See Nancy Fraser and Axel Honneth, *Redistribution or Recognition? A Political-Philosophical Exchange*, translated by Joel Golb, James Ingram, and Christiane Wilke (London: Verso, 2003).

⁶⁵³ Nancy Fraser, *Scales of Justice: Reimagining Political Space in a Globalizing World* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2009).

⁶⁵⁴ Honneth, *Suffering from Indeterminacy: An Attempt at a Reactualization of Hegel's Philosophy of Right. Two Lectures* (Assen: Van Gorcum, 2000).

social movements to an institutional idea of recognition leading up to the idea of democratic ethical life and revolving around the social realization of freedom. At the moment I am writing these lines the book is about to be published in English translation, with translations in several other languages to follow. As such, it is still too soon to grasp the significance of its reception worldwide, or the way in which it will meaningfully reshape recognition studies in philosophy and social theory.

I will offer a few cursive remarks on the book. Honneth takes a distinction between three types of freedom as his point of departure: negative freedom⁶⁵⁵ (drawn from Hobbes), reflexive freedom⁶⁵⁶ (the model of Rousseau and Kant, close to procedural models) and social, substantive freedom⁶⁵⁷ (also called communicative freedom), inspired by Hegel. According to Honneth, each of these types of freedom develops a certain type of institution and leads to a certain type of justice. Negative freedom is individual freedom, that is, freedom from outside coercion over me.

According to Honneth we understand the modern framework according to these three types of freedom. Negative freedom grounds individual rights; reflexive freedom, which entails self-consciousness, is tied to ideals of authenticity and of acting according to one own intentions – i.e., it proceeds according to the criteria of autonomous self-determination. In its version suitable for political philosophy, it leads to procedural attempts at defining collective will-formation. Social freedom, on the other hand, emphasizes the institutional forms that make the individual exercise of freedom itself possible. The fact that social freedom is intersubjective and can be institutionalized allows it to escape the specific type of social pathology which came to be known by Post-Hegelians as “atomism”. In fact, my own freedom can only be instantiated within a meaningful framework of interaction.

One of Honneth’s goals is to assess the processes of democratic will-formation⁶⁵⁸ in their many forms. In so doing he is “reconstructing” the normative ideals according to which these processes could function properly and thereby also

⁶⁵⁵ Honneth, *Das Recht der Freiheit*, *op. cit.*, “Die negative Freiheit und ihre Vertragskonstruktion”, pp. 44-57.

⁶⁵⁶ Honneth, *Ibid.*, “Die reflexive Freiheit und ihre Gerechtigkeitskonzeption”, pp. 58-80.

⁶⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, “Die soziale Freiheit und ihre Sittlichkeitslehre”, pp. 81-118.

⁶⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, “Das ‘Wir’ der demokratischen Willensbildung”, pp. 470-624.

criticizing actually existing processes and practices when they do not correspond to these ideals. However, since this is an immanent critique he is wanting to put forward, these are not abstract ideals, the best set of possible ideals, procedurally established through a constructivist technique. Rather, his reconstructivist approach consists in taking up already-existing norms and ideals (which have a certain degree of normative consensus among us) and then to pit existing practices against these ideals, in order to be able to identify pathologies and distortions in these practices, when compared to the ideals we already accept.

In his analysis of social freedom and the conditions thereof we will once again find the spheres and patterns of recognition. Alongside friendship, family, and other forms that the pattern of love assumes, we find, for instance, the market, conceived, as it was in Hegel, as a system of needs. The main emphasis will be on personal relationships, economic interactions and ultimately the public sphere. Each sphere of mutual recognition will be a social form in which we can actualize freedom. Consequently, he is putting forward a somewhat thick, substantive conception of *ethical life* (*Sittlichkeit*). One of the main guiding threads of this last work is, accordingly, the determination of those conditions without which my own freedom is not possible at all. In this, he follows Hegel's delimitation of objective spirit; that is, our own subjective freedom, framed by the intersubjective framework of the patterns of recognition, is in itself anchored in the institutional norms that grant it a somewhat objective existence.

Louis Carré in a recent work has emphasized how we can find a continuity between Honneth's early insistence on the struggle for recognition and his mature idea of the institutionalization of recognition and its inner ties with social freedom. This unity of his work is, according to Carré, to be found in a longstanding commitment to democratic ethical life.⁶⁵⁹ And this, in spite of the shift of emphasis, which he sums up in the following terms: "the interpersonal relations of recognition are now inscribed in a web of institutions. If, in *The Struggle for Recognition* he seemed to assume that the modes of recognition always go beyond their concrete modes of institutionalization, Honneth now takes

⁶⁵⁹ See Louis Carré, *Axel Honneth: Le droit de la reconnaissance* (Paris: Michalon, 2013), p. 115.

as his point of departure the assumption that the relations of recognition can only be grasped by the institutions of modern ethical life.”⁶⁶⁰

Ultimately, Honneth does not believe that Modernity and its institutions were successful in embodying the perfect forms of freedom and recognition; he still wants to spell out a social critique, but these normative guidelines seem to provide him with the yardstick with which he can measure actually existing reality. And this not by comparing reality with an imaginary yardstick or invented norms but, to reiterate, by comparing already-accepted norms with actually existing practices. This means that he must implicitly accept the standpoint of the possibility of moral progress posited in *The Struggle for Recognition*. As Carré puts it “the ideal of a ‘democratic ethical life’ is not only behind us as something that we have inherited from Modernity but also and for the most part ahead of us, as a project to be sought after.”⁶⁶¹ In this sense, both the task of Critical Theory as the fulfillment of a practical project of emancipation, and the hope that this can come from the agency of social actors themselves is something which in my opinion we can still find in Honneth’s mature theory. He reserves the more critical remarks of his book for the contemporary configurations of market-mediated interactions and democracy in the public sphere. In this, he actually comes closer to authors who, like Habermas as we have seen, were pessimistic concerning the threats of colonization of the lifeworld and those who, like Walzer as we shall see in the next chapter, assert the need for a heterogeneity of social goods in order to protect us from commodification and marked domination.

The book is expected to provoke a meaningful reception in the years to come. But because no translation has been published until now, I can only mention in a few words the inception of this reception. As of this moment, and to my knowledge, the only dossier in English critically engaging it (and including a reply by Honneth) has been organized and recently published by Robin Celikates and Beate Rössler.⁶⁶² From all the critical objections raised against Honneth (to his theoretical framework, different aspects of social freedom, his take on the economy and democratic will-formation) allow me to mention Joel Anderson’s interesting reading of the way in which Honneth puts forward his notion of social

⁶⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 110 [my translation]

⁶⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 113.

⁶⁶² See Dossier “The Right of Freedom”, organized by Robin Celikates and Beate Rössler in *Krisis. Journal for Contemporary Philosophy* 1 (2013): 2-47.

freedom.⁶⁶³ Anderson underscores that in Honneth's account social freedom is a fragile, vulnerable accomplishment; and this because its constitution is menaced by pathology-generating ideologies. Anderson reconstructs the claim as follows: "There are institutionalized understandings of freedom that function, as ideologies, to thwart attempts to realize (shared) self-understandings of our interdependence, thereby undermining the possibilities for realizing the forms of social freedom that these interdependencies call for. These ideologies involve the notion that social freedom is not necessary, not possible, and/or dangerous – dismissals that are reinforced by a wide array of cultural, social, and institutional forces."⁶⁶⁴

Accordingly, Honneth's version of the critique of ideologies assumes the form of a critique of those systematic attempts to make us forget the intrinsically social and intersubjective nature of recognition and freedom. Anderson notes that the majority of examples Honneth provides of movements and developments that seem to counteract this tendency and to bring about a more concrete realization of justice are taken from the past: 20th century labor movements, the political communication of the early years of the press, and so on. But Anderson then asks: "where should social critics and social movements situate the emancipatory imaginary?"⁶⁶⁵ What he aims to disclose are the new sites through which social freedom can instantiate itself. Without this, Anderson claims, we risk falling back into a "*sentimental* mode of utopianism" that risks blocking out the "innovative potential of new developments".⁶⁶⁶ He thus challenges Honneth's account, arguing that we need new examples (if there are any) of this sort of instantiation of positive social freedom, as well as a sort of new compass to navigate the different types of freedom that Honneth's book unveils. That is, he argues that, on some occasions, other types of freedom (for instance, negative freedom) can be the right type of freedom to exercise in particular circumstances of our life. Ultimately, he argues that what is missing from Honneth's account is a description of the capacities that social agents need in order to be able to move between these different types of freedom. So that we can do that, we might need some sort of autonomous agency, one that would allow us to adapt the right kind of freedom to the meaningful context at hand.

⁶⁶³ See Joel Anderson, "The Fragile Accomplishment of Social Freedom" in *Krisis* 1 (2013): 18-21.

⁶⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

⁶⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

⁶⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

In his response to the contributors to the dossier organized by Celikates and Rössler, and concerning the objections raised by Anderson, Honneth concedes that he “did not sufficiently focus on recent counter-movements and innovative projects in the spheres of the market and of democratic politics”⁶⁶⁷ and he mentions Erik Olin Wright’s *Envisioning Real Utopias*⁶⁶⁸ as providing meaningful examples of which he was not aware when writing his book. In my opinion, and even though I will not sufficiently ground this claim here, the contemporary uses of the internet, and the widespread rejection of the abuses of late capitalism and the colonization of the lifeworld by a financial stranglehold, apparent in the *Occupy* and the *Indignados* movements, could perhaps count as meaningful examples of what Anderson is looking for. And these “real utopian” efforts could indeed be something akin to the practical complement of a social imaginary which, since Castoriadis and Ricœur, has perhaps not been given due attention.

Ultimately, as I think is now very clear, Honneth’s social model, in spite of the critiques that have been leveled against it, is perhaps the more encompassing and ambitious social model to account both for positive intersubjective interaction and the conflictual processes that lead up to it. From the struggle for recognition to the critique of ideology, Honneth does see conflict as a generative moment; besides, by spelling out his proposal in strictly post-metaphysical and moral terms, he provides an account of action within a theoretical framework that we can accept in our day and age. He rejects the deterministic temptations of both Hegel and Marx, while retaining something of their social models and dynamics. In spite of the occasional insufficiencies of his theory, I must avow that as is now apparent, his model is the one, alongside that of Ricœur, from which I draw the most, in my reconstruction of contemporary social conflict.

There are, of course, ways to deepen his take on conflict and carry it further. This can be done, for instance, by way of a meaningful connection with other accounts of conflict, mainly in contemporary French philosophy, and namely with Lyotard’s notion of differend (*différend*), and Rancière’s depiction of political disagreement (*mésentente*). Jean-François Lyotard and Jacques Rancière are not Critical Theorists *stricto sensu*. But insofar as their works brought

⁶⁶⁷ Honneth, “Replies” in *Krisis* 1 (2013): 43.

⁶⁶⁸ Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias* (London: Verso, 2010).

meaningful contributions to political philosophy, they can be of fertile use for the depiction of conflict and for possible different applications of critique.

Lyotard in fact sees language itself as an inherently conflictual phenomenon. Taking Wittgenstein's analyzes of language games⁶⁶⁹ as an inspiration, he disputes the emphasis on communication and the priority of consensus over conflict; indeed, he claims that conflict "results from phrases" and that at bottom there is not *a* language at peace with itself. What in fact exists are differends between genres of discourse and we do not usually acknowledge it because "in the matter of language, the revolution of relativity and of quantum theory remains to be made."⁶⁷⁰

The point to be emphasized however is not the relativism of Lyotard's philosophy of language itself; rather it is his insistence on the irreducible character of the differend and the way it plays itself out when what is at stake are the tragic situations of those who are the most fragile. In the beginning of *The Differend* Lyotard invokes Auschwitz and the gas chambers. Speaking about the impossibility of the victims to communicate the wrong (*tort*) done to them, Lyotard explains:

This is what a wrong [*tort*] would be: a damage [*dommage*] accompanied by the loss of the means to prove the damage. This is the case if the victim is deprived of life, or of all his or her liberties, or of the freedom to make his or her ideas or opinions public, or simply of the right to testify to the damage, or even more simply if the testifying phrase is itself deprived of authority. (...) In all of these cases, to the privation constituted by the damage there is added the impossibility of bringing it to the knowledge of others. And in particular to the knowledge of a tribunal.⁶⁷¹

What Lyotard stresses is thus the possibility of such dire social conditions, that those who suffer from them are thereby excluded from the possibility of articulating their experience in a discursive manner and cannot express them in a communicative fashion. Accordingly, what we have left is the possibility of testimony, as a means to respond to the differend. The differend, in practical

⁶⁶⁹ See Jean-François Lyotard, *The Differend: Phrases in dispute*, translated by Georges Van Den Abbeele (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), §181, p. 130.

⁶⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, §188, p. 137.

⁶⁷¹ *Ibid.*, §7, p. 5.

terms, takes place when “the plaintiff is divested of the means to argue and becomes for that reason a victim”.⁶⁷² Usually, when there is a differend between parties, Lyotard argues, “regulation” of that conflict is done “in the idiom of one of the parties while the wrong suffered by the other is not signified in that idiom”.⁶⁷³ The traditional example, taken up by Lyotard, is that of the labor contract as seen by the Marxist standpoint: when regulating labor, the worker as the weaker part in the establishment of the contract, is forced to deal with his working capabilities as if they were a commodity, thereby adopting the terms of the employer.

Therefore, when faced with a differend (in these practical terms), what can we do? Yves Cusset⁶⁷⁴ has forcefully shown that there is a similarity between Lyotard’s analyzes of the situation of the extreme victims of the differend and the profound loss of subjectivation which cripples those who suffer from extreme forms of disrespect, as they were identified by Honneth’s early philosophy. He thus proposes, following Honneth, that there is actually a normative backdrop against which to situate Lyotard’s notions of wrong and differend; if we take the extreme forms of wrong committed against the victims as an ethically unacceptable situation, then what is called for is an ethics of testimony, of those who can testify *for* the victims and, when possible, to reestablish the conditions of communication they were deprived of. According to Cusset, the task of such a project would be a radical struggle against disrespect; we would need to “invent a language open to the most radical experiences of human desubjectivation, where the demand for recognition no longer makes sense. Let us call such an idiom the language of testimony.”⁶⁷⁵ Such a project can be an ethical complement to the politics of recognition, and indeed we find ethical parallels to such a proposal in both Levinas and Ricœur.

Jacques Rancière, for his part, puts forward his notion of *mésentente*, which is a term difficult to translate, but that is usually translated into English as (political) disagreement or, exploring another sense of the word, misunderstanding. Rancière’s standpoint is similar to Lyotard’s, but at the same

⁶⁷² *Ibid.*, §12, p. 9.

⁶⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁶⁷⁴ See Yves Cusset, “Lutter pour la reconnaissance et/ou témoigner du différend: le mépris, entre tort et reconnaissance” in *Où en est la théorie critique?*, edited by Emmanuel Renault and Yves Sintomer (Paris: La Découverte, 2003), pp. 201-216.

⁶⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 213 [My translation].

time departs from it as both Jean-Louis Deotte⁶⁷⁶ and João Pedro Cachopo⁶⁷⁷ have shown. Unlike Lyotard, Rancière does not see differend as being the result of modernity's explosion of small-scale narratives. Rather, he sees disagreement as being constitutive of politics, as what separates it from juridical and commercial exchange.⁶⁷⁸ He explicitly assumes the standpoint of political philosophy and even argues that there might be an occlusion of the specific political element by the social. He argues that there might be "an evacuation of the political by its official representatives".⁶⁷⁹ For him, philosophy is precisely defined by a "mark of a specific paradox, conflict, aporia"⁶⁸⁰; he also considers that philosophy becomes political when it embraces the aporia. According to him, politics is the exercise of equality (or the search thereof) but the principle of equality is in turn dependent on a system of community shares: "when is there and when is there not equality in things between who and who else?"⁶⁸¹

And this is for him a typical matter for disagreement. He claims that "disagreement bears on what it means to be a being that uses words to argue"⁶⁸²; it thus points towards a situation in which the object of discussion itself and the capacity of those who enter the discussion is in dispute. He therefore calls for a "rationality of disagreement"⁶⁸³ that will in fact grant to the political agents a stronger degree of agency than Lyotard allowed for. In fact, as we have seen, sometimes people cannot articulate discursively their situation, which might in fact consist in a situation of suffering. Rancière recovers Aristotle's distinction between discourse and voice (*phoné*). While speech expresses (and thus distinguishes good from evil), voice merely indicates.⁶⁸⁴ But what it indicates inarticulately, can very well be expressions of feelings (even of those such as indignation, or suffering). Accordingly, a radical misunderstanding takes place when, following the specific partition of the perceptible that guides each situation,

⁶⁷⁶ See Jean-Louis Deotte, "The Differences between Rancière's *Mésentente* (Political disagreement) and Lyotard's *Différend*" in *SubStance* 103, vol. 33 nr. 1 (2004): 77-90.

⁶⁷⁷ See João Pedro Cachopo, "Disagreeing before acting: The paradoxes of critique and politics from Adorno to Rancière" in *Theoria and Praxis*, vol. 1, nr. 1 (2013): 64-77.

⁶⁷⁸ See Jacques Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, translated by Julie Rose (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1999), p. 50.

⁶⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. viii.

⁶⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. ix.

⁶⁸¹ *Ibid.*

⁶⁸² *Ibid.*, p. xii.

⁶⁸³ *Ibid.*, chapter three, "The rationality of disagreement", pp. 43-60.

⁶⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 2.

one person cannot understand the other because, according to the judgment of the first person, what the other utters is not meaningful discourse, but rather only inarticulate voice. As Cachopo explains in a footnote, the *Mésentente* can therefore describe the situation when we do not hear or understand what the other is saying, that is, when we “talk past each other”.⁶⁸⁵

The conclusions are obvious. As Deotte puts it: “if slaves, paupers and the disenfranchised are unintelligible, if what they express arises more from a cry than from an argumentative speech, then the outcome will nearly always be a foregone conclusion.”⁶⁸⁶ The problem occurs because the social distribution has already determined those who count and those who do not. Thus Rancière concurs with Honneth’s diagnosis of social invisibility of the disenfranchised. However, the specific intervention that Rancière allows for is precisely one of a redistribution of the perceptible or, more literally, the sensible (his famous notion of the *partage du sensible*) which also calls for a redefinition of what and who counts or does not count in the political sphere.

This brings us to his definition of political intervention. Rancière proposes to call to the distribution of places and roles in society, and to the legitimization of that established order, *police*.⁶⁸⁷ This is what Ricœur would call ideology. Over against the emphasis on consensus, Rancière chooses to define politics as the alteration of those places and roles, in such a way that the disenfranchised come to count: “Politics does not exist because men, through the privilege of speech, place their interests in common. Politics exists because those who have no right to be counted as speaking beings make themselves of some account.”⁶⁸⁸ This is probably akin to what Ricœur would consider a shattering of ideology through initiative, inspired by utopia. Politics, for Rancière, is whatever breaks with that pre-established unjust configuration.⁶⁸⁹ For him, however, the goal of politics seems to be always more or less the same: that is, to (re)establish equality.

One of the main differences between Lyotard and Rancière, resides in the fact that Lyotard insists, more than Rancière, in the fact that conflict (in this case,

⁶⁸⁵ See Cachopo, “Disagreeing before acting”, p. 76.

⁶⁸⁶ Deotte, *op. cit.*, p. 78.

⁶⁸⁷ Rancière, *Disagreement*, p. 28.

⁶⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁶⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

his version of the differend) ultimately resides in an opposition of genres of discourse, whereas Rancière traces back the origin of conflict (as *mésentente*) to what counts or does not count as legitimate speech and, as I just mentioned, what that tells us about the role each person occupies in society. As a result the, let us say, “solutions” to both these forms of conflict will be different. Whereas Lyotard proposed only that we bear witness, or testimony, to the differends, Rancière seems to offer a more optimistic solution, in that he sees politics as precisely a way to change society and gear it towards greater equality. As Cachopo puts it, “the question is how and to what extent those concepts enable us not only to account for certain situations of political conflict (in which “language” and “power” seem to merge into each other), but also to influence those taking part in such situations by means of changing the way in which one understands the situation and imagines its very changeability (or “treatability”).”⁶⁹⁰

Anticipating a small part of the course of conflict we will see with Ricœur in the next three parts of this dissertation, we could almost say that for Lyotard the main source of conflict is always language, and thus his diagnosis is of an almost perpetual conflict of interpretations; and when it happens that social actors are afflicted by a crushing loss of subjectivity, what we can do is at most bear witness to their situation. As for Rancière, the conflict of interpretations will certainly be grounded in a prior practical conflict – and an unjust apportionment of roles in society – and will as such be given a possible practical (in his case, political) solution. Deotte therefore summarizes the difference between Lyotard’s and Rancière’s approach as follows: “Thus, in contrast to Lyotard, Rancière assumes that every voice is potentially articulable, and thus that the wrong that exists because of the difference between voice and speech can be transformed into litigation.”⁶⁹¹ This litigation, in turn, through politics and political discourse, can ultimately tend to transform society and the social order. Cachopo concludes that Rancière’s “analysis of politics culminates in the disclosure of the pure contingency of any social order”.⁶⁹² Ricœur reached the same conclusion in 1975 in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, and his remarks on basic metaphoricity in

⁶⁹⁰ Cachopo, “Disagreeing before acting”, p. 69.

⁶⁹¹ Deotte, *op. cit.*, p. 80.

⁶⁹² Cachopo, p. 171.

The Rule of Metaphor actually provide an insight into the way any given (social or otherwise) order might indeed be only metaphoric and thus open to revision.

Coming back to Honneth, the way in which his recognition-theoretical model can meaningfully intersect with Rancière's depiction of politics and disagreement has been put forward by Jean-Philippe Deranty in an early article. In "Mésentente et lutte pour la reconnaissance"⁶⁹³ Deranty, like Celikates, emphasizes how in certain aspects, Honneth's model is closer to reconciliation than to conflict. In other articles, as I mentioned, he pleads for a political use of Honneth's theory. In this particular article, Deranty argues that Honneth should pay more attention to "the tragic, the non-reconciled, the non-resolved alienation that everywhere threatens each of the intersubjective recognition and reconciliation forms in Hegel."⁶⁹⁴ He also perceives a danger of reification of social hierarchies in the struggle for recognition because, as he sees it, Honneth sometimes seems to take identities as stable and already constituted. He therefore thinks that a greater degree of questioning of these identities is needed, in order for emancipation to be attained. As he puts it: "in order for the quest for recognition to produce political effects, that is, effects that are really egalitarian, we need for social identities to be blurred, forgotten or negated."⁶⁹⁵ He thus seems to want the social order not to be too tightly scripted, even in terms of the constitution of social identities. And while he allows that Honneth's model is the best, most encompassing framework for the struggle for recognition, he wants to see it corrected by Rancière's insistence on equality and the different partition of the sensible needed to attain real emancipation. He also sees in Rancière a good description of the relation between the individual and the social elements, and an emphasis on the political intervention needed to bring about change.

Ultimately, we can say that Honneth balances between conflict and conciliation. The same can be said, as we shall see later, about Ricœur. In Honneth's case, conflict in the shape of the struggle for recognition is evidently the motor that brings, or at least creates the potential to bring about, moral and social progress. He also gives an account of the situations of disrespect and the potential destruction they foster. But each step ultimately points towards possible

⁶⁹³ See Jean-Philippe Deranty, "Mésentente et lutte pour la reconnaissance: Honneth face à Rancière" in *Où en est la théorie critique*, op. cit., pp. 185-199.

⁶⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 191 [My translation].

⁶⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 195.

reconciliations through recognition and communicative freedom, either through meaningful intersubjective relations, or the institutionalization of recognition. As we saw, his social model can be complemented by approaches such as those of Lyotard and Rancière, which allow us to grasp what happens when the conflict and the lack of communication is so dire that the disenfranchised cannot be understood. Personally, I also interpret his proposal for social change in positive terms, and I emphasize the agency put on social actors that might eventually allow them to overcome their sometimes dire situation. As such, I agree with Deranty's and Renault's proposal to politicize his model of recognition. But in the same manner he has been criticized, on one side, for allegedly not making enough space for conflict, he was also criticized, on the other side, by supposedly not making enough room for conciliation and peace.

This was, curiously enough, Ricœur's critique to Honneth, and I will mention it only in passing now, because I will develop it more substantively in part five of this thesis. In *The Course of Recognition*, and after accepting Honneth's reconstruction of Hegel's philosophy of the Jena period, Ricœur comes to grips with the model of the struggle for recognition. After depicting and lauding its merits, Ricœur will, as so often in his work when analyzing the contributions of other authors, also try to find a limit for it. Consequently, he proposes a reading which is somehow resonant of Jean Wahl's reading of the unhappy consciousness in Hegel. In his own words:

Does not the claim for affective, juridical, and social recognition, through its militant, conflictual style, end up as an indefinite demand, a kind of "bad infinity"? This question has to do not only with the negative feelings that go with a lack of recognition, but also with the acquired abilities, thereby handed over to an insatiable quest. The temptation here is a new form of the "unhappy consciousness," as either an incurable sense of victimization or the indefatigable postulation of unattainable ideals.⁶⁹⁶

This does not mean, of course, that Ricœur does not sufficiently take conflict into account in the *Course of Recognition*, or that he eventually rejects Honneth's model. But he would ultimately propose that the collaboration involved in the

⁶⁹⁶ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 218.

conciliatory states of recognition be more granted than demanded, more voluntary than obligatory. This will be his proposal concerning the “states of peace”.

I will come back to this later. For now, allow me to summarize what we have seen with Honneth in this section. We have seen how Honneth starts his career with an attempt to go beyond Habermas’s insistence on the paradigm of communication for social theory. In his early theory, he does this by insisting on the importance of analyzes of power (with the help of Foucault) and by putting the model of struggle as *the* meaningful motor of social evolution and even moral progress. This is done by insisting that the single, most encompassing framework for understanding the motivation of social actors and the possibility of resistance to socially degrading circumstances is the framework of the struggle for recognition unfolding in several different spheres. Ultimately, his model evolves towards the idea of institutions of recognition stemming around the idea of the social realization of freedom. His standpoint is always intersubjectivistic and if he ultimately comes to recover the importance of communication (mostly through the notion of communicative freedom) and of social integration through recognition, conflict does not cease to play a role in the way the patterns of recognition and interaction keep changing and evolving. So conflict plays an essential role in his theory, from the analyzes of power to the transformation of the spheres of recognition. And if I tried to resort to many different interpreters to complement and partially correct his own positions, I do see his model as essential for today’s social theory and conflict theory.

Ultimately, we could describe what I am doing in this thesis by resorting to the vocabulary of the next author whose contribution I shall analyze in the next few pages. What I am doing is depicting a certain “virtue” of conflict, that is, a certain positive function to it, in its many forms. Because he was also marked by the Critical Theory tradition I will end my chapter on Critical Theory with a brief analyzis of Mark Hunyadi’s contribution.

2.1.5 – Hunyadi and the virtue of conflict

Mark Hunyadi's first book, stemming from his doctoral thesis and published in 1995 under the title *La vertu du conflit*⁶⁹⁷ provides a fresh and original take on the relevance of conflict for practical philosophy. As such, and because the application of conflict that is put forward in this book is both fertile and different from all the other standpoints we have seen up until now, it makes sense to mention it in our concise cartography of the uses of conflict in contemporary philosophy.

In the brief foreword to the book, Hunyadi sums up in a few words his standpoint. He wants to put forward a moral point of view whose origin is strictly human – even immanent and post-metaphysical, we could say – but universalist *and* attentive to the context of application of human practices.⁶⁹⁸ Hunyadi's emphasis lies in the normativity of rules, that is, their legitimacy and validity. His starting point and in fact the backdrop of the whole book is a tacit discussion with Wittgenstein, one in which conflict plays a fundamental role.

In the famous §217 of his *Philosophical Investigations* Wittgenstein argued for a pragmatic take on rules and rule following. He stated that when I answer the question “How I am able to follow a rule” what I am doing is justifying the particular way I act; and “once I have exhausted the justifications, I have reached bedrock, and my spade is turned”; his conclusion is that in that moment I must acknowledge that “This is simply what I do”.⁶⁹⁹ This is of course a conclusion stemming from (if not a mere variation of) Wittgenstein's claim according to which “meaning is use”. It is an application of that principle to the practical domain. The corollary to this could be that we should not strive to find justifications because, as the popular adage says, “it is what it is”. This is, in fact, a version of Nietzsche's *amor fati*; but the tragic consequences of this claim for the domain of human action is their quietist attitude. To know that I follow a rule just because I act in a certain way still does not tell me anything about whether or not I *should* follow that rule.

⁶⁹⁷ Mark Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit. Pour une morale de la médiation* (Paris: Cerf, 1995).

⁶⁹⁸ “L'hypothèse qui guide le présent travail vise à établir que l'on peut, sans recourir à aucun élément extérieur aux pratiques humaines elles-mêmes, établir un *point de vue moral* qui soit à la foi universel et respectueux de l'infinie diffraction qui caractérise ces pratiques.” Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit*, p. 7.

⁶⁹⁹ Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, §217, p. 91.

With this in mind, Hunyadi sets out to find a way to pinpoint the normativity of rules. He agrees with Wittgenstein concerning the intersubjective nature of rules: a rule cannot be followed by one man alone, it demands a plurality of users. But the descriptive take on the rule only confirms what it is that I do, or that the rule prescribes. Nonetheless, in order to see whether or not the rule is correct, to unveil its hidden normativity – or even to assess whether or not its claim to be normative is legitimate – Hunyadi argues that we need to dispute its validity.⁷⁰⁰ As such, the task will be, at least in a first approach, to attack the positive content of the norm. Hunyadi thus subverts Wittgenstein's metaphor: what is needed is not to look at this positivity like an unbreakable bedrock, but actually see what happens when it (i.e., the positive content of the rule) indeed breaks.⁷⁰¹

For the purposes of our cartography of conflict, the most interesting chapter of Hunyadi's book is the first one⁷⁰², which assumes the status of a conceptual clarification. He decides to name it “the illuminating force of conflict” and from the title alone we can grasp its programmatic character. He compares Wittgenstein's take on the positivity of rule-following with Pierre Bourdieu's notion of *habitus*. He follows Bourdieu's assertion that, for the most part, institutions and norms operate under the mode of facticity.⁷⁰³ But to take a rule at face value evidently does not tell us anything about its validity. Hunyadi's bold move, and which in fact sums up, in a nutshell, the main argument of the book is that conflict, by imposing a distancing between the rule and its factual existence, unveils its normativity:

It is precisely at this moment that the heuristic force of dissensus comes into play. This force, which goes from simple differend to war reveals – almost in the photographic sense of this term – a hidden aspect of rule-governed intersubjective mediations. By highlighting differences in points of view, opinions, interpretations, interests, utilities,

⁷⁰⁰ “lorsqu'on *conteste* une règle, on ne conteste pas forcément sa signification ; au contraire, on la suppose connue, sans quoi on ne pourrait pas la contester. On la conteste donc dans une autre dimension, qui est celle de sa *validité*. Or, c'est le *conflit* qui sert de révélateur à cette dimension de validité ou de normativité que Wittgenstein n'a pas considérée ; c'est le conflit qui, révélant un désaccord au sujet de la règle telle qu'elle vaut factuellement (sa positivité), met en évidence sa normativité.” Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit*, p. 8.

⁷⁰¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁰² Hunyadi, “La force éclairante du conflit” in *La vertu du conflit*, pp. 9-31.

⁷⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 15.

convictions, intuitions, dissensus sheds the factual evidence of what is valid because it is the case. In that, it *activates* the normative dimension which is inherent to rules.⁷⁰⁴

There is thus, according to Hunyadi, a disclosing function in conflict. To be sure, Hunyadi is not telling us that a rule is not valid because it happens to exist. But what he is saying is that it is not sufficient for a rule to exist in order for it to be legitimate. Its contestation, i.e., putting it to the test by forcing it to undergo – let us use the Ricoeurian formula – a *conflict of interpretations* is in fact, for Hunyadi, the only way to assert its validity. I strongly agree with this claim and it is apparent that Hunyadi is here close to Ricoeur's notion of the conflict of interpretations, even though he does not explicitly mention it.

As we shall see when I directly address the notion of social philosophy in the last chapters of this thesis, the conflict of interpretations can be put to a use which is similar to the function Hunyadi attributes to conflict in *La vertu du conflit*. According to him, once there is a transition from the factual to the normative standpoint, it undergoes a transformation.⁷⁰⁵ Conflict transforms rules. Even though a consensus might be reached (after the conflictual process of disputing the rule), the rule will have been transformed because it will cease to be merely factual and it will have become grounded in a normative manner. Consequently, we can even speak about a generative power of conflict.

This does not mean that a consensus or a mediation does not need to be reached. Indeed, for Hunyadi (as for Habermas), it does. In chapter two Hunyadi therefore puts forward a “pragmatics of mediation”⁷⁰⁶ in which he distinguishes different types of rules (constitutive, practical, technical, prescriptive and categorial rules) and their different relations towards practices. Thus constitutive rules, for instance, are those that create the practices they rule; without those rules, the practices governed by them would not exist. However, all rules are, to an extent, both constitutive and prescriptive, even though they can be ranged in several ideal types, and this is something Hunyadi strives to do.⁷⁰⁷ Each type of rule sends us back to a different type of practice and to a different type of

⁷⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 16 [my translation]

⁷⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁰⁶ Hunyadi, “Pragmatique de la médiation” in *La vertu du conflit*, pp. 33-83.

⁷⁰⁷ See the table in page 47 for a brief outlook of the several types of rules and their respective constitutive and prescriptive dimensions.

intersubjective relation grounding that practice. Hunyadi explicitly claims that the normativity of rules sprouts from the concrete intersubjectivity which forms a specific type of community.⁷⁰⁸ And it is always within that same community that a solution for the conflict can be sought after.

As such, if rules and conflicts originate in an intersubjective community of practices and values, and if indeed conflict is both necessary and eventually needs to be overcome, we thus need a solution for it. And this is what Hunyadi, following a long tradition, calls mediation. His move is, however, to emphasize the importance of mediation in practical philosophy: at this point in time, he calls for the establishment of a “morality of mediation”. Thus in the third and final chapter of this book, entitled “Le principe de la médiation”⁷⁰⁹ Hunyadi explicitly defines morality as an effort to deal with conflicts and solve them:

Morality is not so much connected to specific objects (the just, the good) as it is tied to the *solution of conflicts in general*. Insofar as the normativity of the rule is activated by conflict and the heuristic force of the latter resides in its capacity to manifest the level of concrete intersubjectivity in which is rooted the agreement that validates rule, it is conflict – insofar as it manifests diverging aspirations – that becomes the core of morality as such.⁷¹⁰

This leads him to conclude that a moral conflict is not necessarily a conflict dealing with such and such a specific object (what is good or just, etc.) but that, on the other hand, *every* conflict has a *moral dimension* since, to reiterate, it awakens the normativity of rules because it highlights the “*recognition claims of diverging aspirations*”.⁷¹¹

Accordingly, Mark Hunyadi posits a pragmatics of conflict mediation as the main task that addresses morality. And he is indeed focusing on recognition when he defines such a task for morality.⁷¹² In this case, what is at stake is not

⁷⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 83.

⁷⁰⁹ Hunyadi, “Le principe de la médiation”, in *La vertu du conflit* pp. 85-112.

⁷¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 85: “la morale n’est pas tant liée à tel ou tel objet (le juste, le bien) qu’à la *résolution des conflits en général*. Dès lors que la normativité de la règle est activée par le conflit, que la force heuristique de celui-ci réside donc dans sa capacité à manifester le niveau de l’intersubjectivité concrète où s’enracine l’accord qui les valide, c’est le conflit en tant qu’il manifeste des aspirations divergentes qui devient l’enjeu par excellence de la morale.” [My translation]

⁷¹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷¹² *Ibid.*, p. 86.

directly the recognition of social actors or collective groups as it was in Honneth. But it is so in an indirect manner, inasmuch as when what we are dealing with is the validity of claims concerning rules that are put forward by those social actors, the debate concerning the normativity of the rule also entails that when we discuss the rule what we are also discussing are the identities of those affected by it, and Hunyadi explicitly acknowledges this.⁷¹³ Allow me to provide an example. If what is at stake is a rule that will determine the rights of a certain group of people (will, for instance, immigrants be granted rights of political participation or not) the outcome of the conflict of interpretations concerning that rule – maybe the already-existing rule is unjust and needs to be reformulated – will also be decisive for the identity of those who will be directly concerned by it. Accordingly, in the example given, for a group of immigrants in a given country, the fact that they are granted some political rights of participation will be decisive in the determination of their own identity, insofar as the objective attribution of rights (and the fact these are legal rights does not occlude the fact the issue is also a moral one) will also determine their moral standing, and as such also a significant part of their identity, towards society in general.

So, to sum up Hunyadi's proposal, we come to the conclusion that for him in this early book, every conflict of rules is implicitly a moral conflict and therefore what morality must try to do, to employ one expression used before, is to look for a treatability of those conflicts and, by mediating them, attempt to solve them. The rest of Hunyadi's book tries to establish what he calls a "moral point of view". He wants to conceptually determine what "validity" means and he voluntarily adopts a deflationary standpoint on morality. He steers away from a substantive definition of morality and limits the task of morality to the determination of the moral point of view: "the moral point of view is limited to determining *the perspective according to which a litigious rule could be said to be legitimate*."⁷¹⁴ Hunyadi tries to provide what we could call a "horizontal" solution for the conflicts of rules. That is, he acknowledges that there are different types of rules each of which producing different types of normativity. But he posits that every litigation concerning a rule must be solved in the level of the rule which is

⁷¹³ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 88: "le point de vue moral se limite à déterminer *la perspective à partir de laquelle une règle litigieuse pourrait être dite légitime*." [My translation]

imposed by the nature of that same rule.⁷¹⁵ This means that he does not try to establish a lexical order among rules like Rawls did with his principles of justice, or even less speak about “hypergoods” and hierarchies of goods, which would be the path followed by Charles Taylor. We will see these solutions in the next two chapters.

Hunyadi in fact adopts what we could call a procedural solution. And he admits the influence of Habermas in his own standpoint. He admits to having a Habermasian, “post-metaphysical” standpoint.⁷¹⁶ His proposal is thus of a “post-traditional” morality, in the sense we have seen above, when analyzing Habermas’s ethics of discussion. Accordingly, Hunyadi’s solution will be pluralistic. Arguing that for his moral point of view there is never such a task as to impose an ethical worldview, he claims that “the task is, on the other hand, in an age of a pluralization of pretensions claiming recognition, of finding a point of view that could make their coexistence feasible.”⁷¹⁷

Now, in my own standpoint, in the leads I am following from several authors, from Ricœur to Honneth and Taylor, I will often argue for a more substantive standpoint, more angled towards the good than to a procedural standpoint. However, I am deeply sympathetic with Hunyadi’s early appraisal of conflict and its virtues. Sometimes, Honneth speaks about a certain type of critique, which he dubs *disclosing critique* (*erschließende Kritik*)⁷¹⁸. Now I think that what Hunyadi is doing is to pinpoint, in this early book, a *disclosing power of conflict*, that is, in his case, a disclosing of the normativity of conflictual rules. Now, Ricœur himself would speak about the conflict of rules (or the conflict of duties) in *Oneself as Another*. As I mentioned before, he aimed to go beyond the deontological moment and in so doing he departs from the standpoint that Kant, Rawls, Habermas and in a certain sense also Hunyadi share. But his overall strategy of conflict is grounded, or so I will argue, in a somewhat constructivist perspective that leads to an *enlarged standpoint*. As such, and as I will contend later, one of the features of Ricœur’s use of conflict is that he grants conflict a *disclosing power* too. Not, in his case, a power of disclosing the normativity of rules, but of

⁷¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷¹⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁷¹⁸ See Honneth, “The Possibility of a Disclosing Critique of Society: *The Dialectic of Enlightenment* in Light of Current Debates in Social Criticism” in *Disrespect*, pp. 49-62.

disclosing the whole picture of a given problem and also of finding theoretical alternatives or practical solutions to it. As such, I believe that in an indirect manner, what Hunyadi tells us about the conflict of rules helps us to partially grasp what is at stake in Ricœur's general use of the category of conflict in his philosophy. This will become apparent in the next parts of this thesis.

Ultimately, Hunyadi in this first book tends to point towards a possible agreement concerning the coexistence of a plurality of values and rules.⁷¹⁹ In this, he is not very far from Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice*, even if in a later book Hunyadi heavily criticizes Walzer's communitarian standpoint.⁷²⁰ He concentrates on the quality of the rules that guide the attribution of respect. According to him, there are no "moral facts" in themselves, only rules that elevate facts to the dignity of moral facts.⁷²¹ Accordingly, and as Habermas, he underscores the procedure of just solution of conflicts between persons with divergent aspirations.⁷²² Towards the end of his book, he argues for context sensitive solutions that establish, on a case-by-case scenario and in an intersubjective manner, how the mediation is going to unfold.⁷²³ This is a very interesting turn of his argument, and it brings him to the neighborhood of the Ricœur of *Oneself as Another* who himself argued for an "invention of the rule" adapted to each case in what he called "practical wisdom". Hunyadi's ultimate insistence on a "just mediation"⁷²⁴ is also not a stranger to Ricœur's standpoint taken as whole.

In later books, Mark Hunyadi decided to further develop this context sensitivity of moral action; as such, his mature books put forward a contextualist approach to morality⁷²⁵ which, to reiterate, finds echoes in Ricœur's practical wisdom. He puts forward a notion of *objective moral context*⁷²⁶ that aims at simultaneously going beyond a minimalist ethics (only focused on the topic of justice) and provide a better epistemological and practical grounding to the notion of context. He is still interested in the notion of a moral point of view and of

⁷¹⁹ Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit*, pp. 94-95.

⁷²⁰ See Mark Hunyadi, *L'art de l'exclusion. Une critique de Michael Walzer* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2000).

⁷²¹ Hunyadi, *La vertu du conflit*, p. 98.

⁷²² *Ibid.*, p. 99.

⁷²³ *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁷²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁷²⁵ See Mark Hunyadi, *Morale Contextuelle* (Québec: Presses de l'Université Laval, 2008) and Mark Hunyadi, *L'Homme en contexte* (Paris: Éditions du Cerf, 2012).

⁷²⁶ See Hunyadi, *Morale Contextuelle*, p. 9.

validity, but now under the banner of the moral context. Thus for instance he now states that conflict reactivates not only the normativity of the rule, but also the normativity of the objective moral context in which the rule is inscribed.⁷²⁷ And he wants to put forward a type of morality that goes beyond the opposition between the just and the good and tackles fundamental questions for our own desire to live together, as Ricœur would put it. As such, his standpoint is perhaps today less proceduralist, which allows him to provide a “thicker” response to these fundamental questions – such as, do we want a world in which all commodification is possible, or human clones are allowed, and so on.⁷²⁸

Interesting as his new proposal is, I cannot delve in detail in it here, because I need to assess the other meaningful contributions of conflict in contemporaneity. In this chapter, we have seen how conflict is tackled in some of the main works produced by critical theorists of the first three generations of Critical Theory. We have seen how in different contexts conflict is given center stage, either in the depiction of man’s inner conflict (repression of instincts) and the fundamental conflict against nature in Adorno and Horkheimer; the way conflict is located by Habermas against the backdrop of communicative reason and then an ethics of discussion by Habermas; Honneth’s insistence on conflict in the form of the struggle for recognition as the motor for social change, as well as its possible social and political intersection with the works of Lyotard and Rancière; finally, we have seen Hunyadi’s appraisal of the virtue of conflict as a disclosing of normativity, and I hinted at how this appraisal of conflict could reveal us something about the way conflict functions in the works of Ricœur.

All the way through this chapter dedicated to Critical Theory, the sociological standpoint has been mixed with the properly philosophical standpoint. That is, ethics and political philosophy have been always in the background of these assessments. In the next chapter, I will start with an account that is more purely connected to normative political philosophy, namely, the theory of justice of John Rawls. Then I will mention the more pluralist, thicker objections to Rawls, especially in the form they assume in Michael Walzer. Finally, taking the plurality of the instances of justice as my guiding thread, I will mention the pragmatic sociology of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot. This final stage will provide me

⁷²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁷²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 73.

with a chance to reconnect with the topic of social critique which was one of the guiding threads of the chapter that I am now closing.

2.2 – Rawls, Walzer and Boltanski-Thévenot: The Conflict Between Universalism and the Plurality of Justice

In the second chapter of this cartography of the contemporary reappraisal of conflict, I will turn to what at first glance might seem like a less substantive account of conflicts. We have already seen in the previous chapter a procedural ethical standpoint, with Habermas's ethics of discussion. Now I turn to the contemporary theories of justice. I will evidently not provide a full account of them, because this field has had such a wide array of contributions in the last century, that it would be impossible to do so in a few pages. I will leave out such important contributions as those of Amartya Sen, and only mention in a very brief and cursory manner the theories of justice of Nozick and Sandel. I will have to start with Rawls's procedural theory of justice, because his was the seminal work that spawned all the later discussion. When coming back to Walzer (and, in the next chapter, to Taylor) as my privileged counterweights to Rawls, I hope to flesh out the substantive alternatives to Rawls's thin theory of justice.

In the second half of the 20th century, perhaps partly because of the horrors witnessed during the two preceding World Wars, not only the practical affirmation of human rights, but also the urge to theoretically ground a theory of justice became one of the leading concerns. This was particularly true in the Anglo-Saxon world; and perhaps, in the context of analytical political philosophy, no book was so influential as John Rawls's *A Theory of Justice*.⁷²⁹ His procedural, deontological approach, renewing with the social contract theory that had been somewhat forgotten since the 18th century, and at the same time rekindling a Post-Kantian universalistic approach transposed from moral philosophy to political theory, was simultaneously inspiring and controversial, fueling the most participated debate in political philosophy in the last 50 years.

Rawls was met with fierce criticism by people like Nozick, on the one hand, and by communitarians such as Walzer, Taylor and Sandel (all of whom sometimes feel uncomfortable with the label), on the other. It would be out of the scope of this brief chapter to discuss all the main stakes of these debates. However, I would like to take a cursory look at the debate taking place between

⁷²⁹ John Rawls, *A Theory of Justice* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 1971).

Rawls and Walzer, namely on the nature of social goods, and on the ways to apportion and distribute those social goods, not only because this is a vital question that any theory of justice needs to address, but also because Ricœur himself commented on this topic. As will become apparent, the distribution, or redistribution of social goods, will be one of the main sources of conflict in this particular arena.

2.2.1 – Rawls: society as a consensual-conflictual phenomenon⁷³⁰

From the very first chapter of *A Theory of Justice*, Rawls defines justice as pertaining to social institutions. According to him, “Justice is the first virtue of social institutions.”⁷³¹ At first glance, conflict plays a big role in his theory. Rawls asks us to assume that people let themselves be guided by systems of rules and that these exist because societies are a system of cooperation. But he immediately adds that cooperation is not in itself evident:

Then, although a society is a cooperative venture for mutual advantage, it is typically marked by a conflict as well as by an identity of interests. There is an identity of interests since social cooperation makes possible a better life for all than any would have if each were to live solely by his own efforts. There is a conflict of interests since persons are not indifferent as to how the greater benefits produced by their collaboration are distributed, for in order to pursue their ends they each prefer a larger to a lesser share.⁷³²

Thus the conflict is, for Rawls, an integral part of the way in which we live in society. The risk is, for him, that conflict overcomes the identity of interests and that cooperation ceases to be possible. Ricœur captured well the essence of this constitutive dialectic in Rawls’s theory:

Inasmuch as society presents itself as a system of distribution, every division into shares is problematic and open to equally reasonable alternatives. Since there are several plausible manners of dividing up advantages and disadvantages, society is through and

⁷³⁰ In this section, other than to Ricœur, I am especially indebted to Pedro Viegas Santos, *Consenso e Conflito no Pensamento de John Rawls. A Perversa Ingenuidade do Liberalismo*. (Lisboa: Colibri, 2004).

⁷³¹ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 3.

⁷³² *Ibid.*, p. 4.

through a consensual-conflictual phenomenon. On the one hand, every allocation of shares can be challenged – especially in the context of unequal distribution. On the other hand, to be stable, distribution requires a consensus about the procedures for arbitrating among competing demands.⁷³³

This is, in a nutshell, the core of Rawls's need to find a procedural theory of justice. Since every apportionment is potentially conflictual, there must be a way, he thinks, to find a set of rules sufficiently capable of arbitrating among these conflicts and arriving at a suitable solution.

Rawls's solution is to postulate an original position where people, under a veil of ignorance, would establish the principles of justice binding the society to come. This is the basis for his version of the social contract. The veil of ignorance makes sure that the participants choosing the principles of justice “do not know how the various alternatives will affect their own particular case”.⁷³⁴ Moreover, they will not know their place in society, class position or social status, not even their conceptions of the good or their natural abilities. Rawls keeps them blind to the particular socio-economic and cultural situation of their future society too. Their knowledge is kept to a strict minimum, they only know what is needed to fulfill the procedural criteria needed for the choice. This is why, Rawls explains, he defines justice as “fairness”: the principles of justice are agreed to in an initial situation that is fair.⁷³⁵ By all accounts, this is a thought experiment and so the question might be raised – as it was indeed raised by Walzer, Ricœur, and others – as to what efficacy a postulated, ahistorical pact might have in what are always already-existing societies, with their prevailing traditions and practices, which are more often than not the result of processes of evolution and sedimentation.

In fact, Rawls places the emphasis on the process of deliberation, in part guided by the assumptions on human agency that are described in the theory of rational choice. Rawls's specific approach, however, is to consider that in this process agents are both rational and mutually disinterested (partly because what the veil hides forces them to be so).

Certainly, Rawls does more than describing the procedural criteria through which a choice of the principles of justice might take place. He also puts

⁷³³ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 233-234.

⁷³⁴ Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 118.

⁷³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

forward an argument for what principles should in fact be adopted. These will together form what he calls the “basic structure” of society, that is, the “arrangement of social institutions into one scheme of cooperation”.⁷³⁶ Now, these basic social principles of justice are in fact two, for Rawls. He offers several definitions of these, first in chapter 11 in a tentative form, then in chapter 13, and finally a “definitive” formulation in chapter 46. The justification of why these are *the* two principles, the discussion of their respective meanings, and the justification of why there is a priority of one of them over the other, occupies a substantial part of the book, and it has also been a source of contention ever since the *Theory of Justice* was published.

The definitive formulation of these two principles states:

FIRST PRINCIPLE

Each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive total system of equal basic liberties compatible with a similar system of liberty for all.

SECOND PRINCIPLE

Social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both:

- (a) to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged, consistent with the just savings principle, and
- (b) attached to offices and positions open to all under conditions of fair equality of opportunity.⁷³⁷

The first might be called the principle of equal liberty, whereas the second can be broken down into a) the difference principle and b) the equality of opportunity principle.

According to Rawls, there is a lexical priority which establishes that the order of importance of the principles is as follows: 1) equal liberty; 2) equality of opportunity and 3) the difference principle. Now, this procedure is there for a reason: Rawls knows that in practice there will be situations where these principles might conflict. To reiterate, his procedural criteria are established in order to deal with conflict and to mitigate or even deal away with it, if possible.

His insistence on the priority of the first principle makes clear that his is a

⁷³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁷³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 266.

liberal standpoint, as against, for instance, an egalitarian standpoint; throughout the whole process, Rawls presupposes the application of what he calls the “maximin rule” or “the maximin criterion” (that applies to the difference principle). It entails that the difference principle is inferior to the equality principle, but that this has some exceptions:

All social values – liberty and opportunity, income and wealth, and the social bases of self-respect – are to be distributed equally unless an unequal distribution of any, or all, of these values is to everyone’s advantage.⁷³⁸

The maximin rule is a rule of choice under uncertainty used in economic theory. It tells us, according to Rawls’s concise formulation “to rank alternatives by their best possible outcomes: we are to adopt the alternatives the worst outcome of which is superior to the worst outcomes of the others.”⁷³⁹ Translated in terms of the principles of justice, social and economic inequalities are only acceptable if they are “to the greatest benefit of the least advantaged”.

To be sure, Rawls’s approach is not *entirely* procedural. In fact, he wants to see if his description of the original position matches what he calls our “considered convictions” of justice or “extends them” in an acceptable way.⁷⁴⁰ He thus displays a certain trust in a pre-theoretical or, if we may put it this way, pre-procedural layer of experience. Our considered convictions are something akin to our moral intuitions. He gives the example of racial discrimination, or religious intolerance. We naturally intuit that they are unjust. Therefore, the principles are to be tested, to make sure whether or not they are able to accommodate our “firmest convictions”.⁷⁴¹

He also, of course, takes into consideration the possibility that there might be a discrepancy between our convictions, and the principles we arrive at. In that case, he argues, either we modify the account of the initial situation, or we revise our judgments. In this, he remains radically Kantian in that he believes in the possibility of radically revising even our firmest beliefs. But this accommodation, he argues, is not automatic or straightforward, it is something

⁷³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 54.

⁷³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

⁷⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 18.

akin to a “back and forth” movement, which he dubs a “reflective equilibrium”:

By going back and forth, sometimes altering the conditions of the contractual circumstances, at others withdrawing our judgments and conforming them to principle, I assume that eventually we shall find a description of the initial situation that both expresses reasonable conditions and yields principles which match our considered judgments duly pruned and adjusted. This state of affairs I refer to as reflective equilibrium. It is an equilibrium because at last our principles and judgments coincide; and it is reflective since we know to what principles our judgments conform and the premises of their derivation. At the moment everything is in order. But this equilibrium is not necessarily stable. It is liable to be upset by further examination of the conditions which should be imposed on the contractual situation and by particular cases which may lead us to revise our judgments.⁷⁴²

The reflective equilibrium is, we must acknowledge, the closest that Rawls can get – at least in *A Theory of Justice* – to a substantive conception of the good. The will to take into account our “firmest convictions” is a proof of that effort. Ricœur will take up that lead and propose that we take seriously our “considered convictions”. However, for Rawls the reflective equilibrium, even though it might sound dialectical, remains strictly procedural.

This is perhaps the reason why there will be a slight shift in Rawls’s standpoint. Rawls’s mature thought is expressed in his later book *Political Liberalism*⁷⁴³, where he more clearly adopts the standpoint of political philosophy. One of the main problems he will try to tackle is precisely the fact of political pluralism, that is, of a variety of “comprehensive doctrines” and “conceptions of the good” that makes up existing societies. Hence, he postulates a difference between what he dubs “comprehensive doctrines” and his political conception of justice, which is supposed to be more attuned to the need to reach a consensus between existing conceptions of justice. As such, his insistence is not so much on the method of the veil of ignorance anymore, even though he still posits a constructivist approach and in fact a very thin theory of justice (precisely in that he wants to avoid it becoming a “comprehensive doctrine”).

I will focus mainly on what he dubs “overlapping consensus”, which is a

⁷⁴² *Ibid.*

⁷⁴³ John Rawls, *Political Liberalism* (New York: Columbia University Press, 1996).

different way of solving disagreements. This expression is briefly mentioned in *A Theory of Justice*⁷⁴⁴, but it is only developed in the article called “The idea of an overlapping consensus”. This article was originally published in 1987, and later republished and reframed as a part of Rawls’s *Political Liberalism*.⁷⁴⁵

Rawls sets the framework for his new take on the problem of justice in the very first page of his article, in the following terms: “how is it possible that there can be a stable and just society whose free and equal citizens are deeply divided by conflicting and even incommensurable religious, philosophical, and moral doctrines?”⁷⁴⁶ It is to this question that political liberalism is supposed to provide an answer. According to Rawls, conceptions of justice are divided according to whether or not they accept political pluralism. There are “those that allow for a plurality of reasonable though opposing comprehensive doctrines each with its own conception of the good”⁷⁴⁷ and those that do not. He claims that under enduring political institutions we can accept the coexistence of those plural views of the good.⁷⁴⁸ Consequently, or so the claim goes, no comprehensive doctrine is appropriate as a political conception for a constitutional regime.⁷⁴⁹ To be sure, Rawls does not say we cannot hold comprehensive doctrines. However, what he does claim is that we cannot draw a liberal theory of justice from them and, furthermore, that we cannot use political power to impose our own comprehensive doctrines (or conceptions of the good) onto others.⁷⁵⁰ This means that political values, and namely the principles upheld by political liberalism, should override all the other values, when what is at stake is a political decision. We can therefore uphold our comprehensive doctrines as being reasonable and even true, without however using political power to enforce them.

⁷⁴⁴ In the *Theory of Justice* Rawls mentions the overlapping consensus in the context of finding the conditions to ensure the existence and maintenance of a common sense of justice. He acknowledges that society is a locus of individual and group egoism and that there will be difficulties in making sure this agreement is maintained. And he then arrives at the conclusion that it will probably not be so difficult as it sound, because a strict consensus is not needed, only an overlapping one: “Although those who acknowledge the principles of justice should always be guided by them, in a fragmented society as well as in one moved by group egoisms, the conditions for civil disobedience do not exist. Still, it is not necessary to have strict consensus, for often a degree of overlapping consensus allows the reciprocity condition to be fulfilled.” See Rawls, *A Theory of Justice*, p. 340.

⁷⁴⁵ Rawls, *Political Liberalism*, pp. 133-172.

⁷⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

⁷⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁷⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 135.

⁷⁴⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 139.

Rawls is looking for a consensus with a certain degree of stability, one that can properly frame the political structure of a given society. He insists that an overlapping consensus is to be distinguished from a mere *modus vivendi*⁷⁵¹, that is, it is more than a strategic agreement whose parts are willing to pursue their interests at the expense of the other, regardless of the agreement.⁷⁵² Thus this is an agreement to be founded not on interests, not as “the outcome of political bargaining”,⁷⁵³ and that must not be indifferent or skeptical.⁷⁵⁴ This means that we need not be hostile to truth, only to violence, irrationality and abuse of power. We need not be relativistic either. What we need is to find some common ground on which to agree, while inserting this common ground in our own comprehensive religious, philosophical or moral view to which we can adhere. That is, Rawls does not reject our “considered convictions”. But he insists that political conceptions need not be comprehensive.⁷⁵⁵ Accordingly, the basic structure of society, upon which the overlapping consensus will be built, will decide what are the conflicts that can or cannot be politically solved.

Rawls therefore explicitly claims that “we must frame the institutions of the basic structure so that intractable conflicts are unlikely to arise”.⁷⁵⁶ Following his deflationist approach he asserts that “a political conception is at best but a guiding framework of deliberation and reflection which helps us reach political agreement”.⁷⁵⁷ But with these last assertions it becomes very clear how Rawls ultimately assesses conflicts. In the last analysis, conflict is something to be as much as possible avoided. Nowhere is this clearer than when Rawls assumes that:

Faced with the fact of reasonable pluralism, a liberal view removes from the political agenda the most divisive issues, serious contention about which must undermine the bases of social cooperation.⁷⁵⁸

Conflict is thus seen as a threat, not a generative and creative power. Rawls

⁷⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

⁷⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 147.

⁷⁵³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

⁷⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

⁷⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 156.

⁷⁵⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

therefore admits that public reason is a work of reconciliation⁷⁵⁹ and that the idea of overlapping consensus is itself a utopian idea.⁷⁶⁰ As such, all he can do is to provide the indication of certain “steps” which would in principle bring us closer to a “constitutional consensus” or an “overlapping consensus”. A constitutional consensus is taken to be a mere consensus on principles;⁷⁶¹ it only includes the political procedures of democratic government.⁷⁶² An overlapping consensus, by contrast, will be the shared public conception that overlaps in several reasonable standpoints and is thus secured by a common agreement. The constitutional consensus ensures the existence of political basic rights and liberties. But it is supposed to suffuse citizens with “the virtue of reasonableness and a sense of fairness, a spirit of compromise and a readiness to meet others halfway”.⁷⁶³ This last passage speaks volumes about the public virtues that Rawls chooses to emphasize.

Ultimately, Rawls concedes that a full overlapping consensus is “never achieved but at best only approximated”.⁷⁶⁴ But he does want more than a “purely political and procedural constitutional consensus”⁷⁶⁵ because that would be too narrow. He thus calls for a consensus on substantive freedoms such as liberty of conscience, freedom of thought, association and movement, as well as measures to assure the basic needs of all citizens so that they can take part in political and social life,⁷⁶⁶ even though he clarifies that the need to satisfy basic needs is not tantamount to a push for greater equality or economic redistribution. The result is that his ideas remain somewhat vague; that is, they are mere principles. He reasserts his idea of justice as fairness as entailing a “fair system of cooperation” axed on democratic ideals of persons as being “free and equal”.⁷⁶⁷ But he ultimately remains too closely tied to ideal theory. Not surprisingly, he seems to condemn conflict as a merely negative phenomenon, that is, something to be avoided and to which we must always find a solution.

This is evidently a very cursory presentation of Rawls’s method.

⁷⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

⁷⁶¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁷⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

⁷⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 165.

⁷⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

⁷⁶⁶ *Ibid.*

⁷⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 167.

However, we can ask, how seriously does it really take social conflict? In the previous chapter we have seen, with Honneth, Celikates, Hunyadi, among others, that there might be a “virtue” to conflict, in that it can have a generative power, a capacity for generating social integration and formulate rules. None of that is present in Rawls. To be sure, his theory is not *completely* procedural and constructivist, but it is *mainly* procedural and almost *always* constructivist. In that, it is deontological and essentially ideal. It is true that he does his best to provide us with a finely nuanced and rational model. And it is also true that he came a long way since the publication of the *Theory of Justice*. That is, his initial model of the veil of ignorance was merely a thought experiment and completely unrealistic, probably totally unfit for already-existing societies. His attempt to devise a reflective equilibrium and – to an even greater extent – the overlapping consensus are attempts to bring his theory closer to reality but one can always ask what descriptive power they have.

Rawls presents no serious attempt to tackle the problem of unequal power relations in society. He seems to almost overlook the problem of domination in societies and he does not tell us enough on how to overcome situations of already-constituted injustice. His focus on a procedural theory of justice risks leaving out meaningful conceptions of the good upon which our shared identities hinge. Many have seen in Rawls’s early theory a host of disembodied individuals. Feminists, for instance, have pressed this point, as well as the seeming absence of notions of care, emotion and relationship in his work.⁷⁶⁸ Communitarians, on the other hand, have pointed to the insufficient way Rawls takes communities into account, and decried the way his liberal depiction almost seems to look at individuals as isolated beings, ignoring their previous insertion into meaningful intersubjective relationships, traditions and so forth. As Michael Sandel puts it in a critical tone, for Rawls “We are distinct individuals first, and *then* we form relationships and engage in co-operative arrangements with others”.⁷⁶⁹ Likewise, his notion of

⁷⁶⁸ For a careful assessment of the feminist readings of Rawls, including the ways in which his political liberalism does in fact address or might be modified to better address feminist concerns, see Martha Nussbaum, “Rawls and Feminism” in *The Cambridge Companion to Rawls*, edited by Samuel Freeman (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003), pp. 488-520.

⁷⁶⁹ See Michael Sandel, *Liberalism and the Limits of Justice* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1982), p. 53. For a detailed account of the several apologies and critiques of liberalism, see also his classical *Liberalism and Its Critics*, edited by Michael Sandel (New York: New York University Press, 1984).

overlapping consensus has also been under attack. For instance, Marcel Becker in a recent article has argued that Rawls's strict separation between comprehensive doctrines and his own political conception of "justice as fairness" is more problematic than at first glance appears. Becker asserts that even though Rawls rejects a substantive espousal of the good in a theory of justice, he is indeed putting forward a description of the "good citizen" that ultimately brings him closer to a substantive ethics of virtues than he would have admitted.⁷⁷⁰ This reading is confirmed by Rawls's emphasis on the "virtue of reasonableness" to which I alluded before. Becker concludes that there is an ambiguity in Rawls's overlapping consensus and that therefore his strict distinction between private moralities and public morality can be challenged. He argues that the only way for the overlapping consensus to have any practical effect (even as a motivation for actors in the public sphere) is to let its frontiers with comprehensive doctrines be less strict than Rawls allowed for.⁷⁷¹ According to him, only comprehensive doctrines are the sources of political values and thus provide the "moral energy" that drives people to participate in the political public sphere. To ignore that this is so is tantamount to incurring a descriptive deficit and thus not being able to come down from ideal theory to empirical reality.

Ricœur, for his part, had a positive but critical assessment of Rawls. Dosse emphasizes how the appropriation of the Anglo-Saxon debates on the theory of justice was very important for Ricœur in the 1990s, when he started thinking about the institutional forms of conflict in society, judicial practices and the judiciary system.⁷⁷² He also underscores that in these debates Rawls played for Ricœur an essential role. Even if in many aspects Ricœur was closer to the "communitarians" and to a substantive version of the good, he saw in Rawls's *Theory of Justice* and its later developments the point of departure for all later debates.

There is a good amount of scholarship analyzing the relation between Ricœur and Rawls.⁷⁷³ Trying not to anticipate too much Ricœur's treatment of

⁷⁷⁰ See Marcel Becker "E Pluribus Unum? Critical Comments on John Rawls' Concept of Overlapping Consensus" in *Religion, State and Society* 41, 2 (2013): 193.

⁷⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

⁷⁷² Dosse, *Les sens d'une vie*, p. 611.

⁷⁷³ See mainly Molly Harkirat Mann, *Ricœur, Rawls and Capability Justice: Civic Phronesis and Equality* (London: Continuum, 2012). See also Eileen Brennan, "Doing Justice to Justice: Ricœur's Discovery of the Juridical Plane" and Patrick Turmel "Concept et objet de la justice:

conflict in the judicial domain, a more extensive discussion of which I will leave for part five, I will try to condensate in a provisional manner the core of Ricœur's appraisals and rejections of Rawls, at least in the articles that he explicitly dedicates to Rawls's theory of justice. I will mention four main articles. The first two articles are from 1988-90 and, to my knowledge, they have not been translated into English, but they have been republished in French in *Lectures I*: "John Rawls: de l'autonomie morale à la fiction du contrat social"⁷⁷⁴ and "Le cercle de la démonstration".⁷⁷⁵ The second pair of articles is more or less from the same period and they have been republished in *The Just*. One of them has been originally published in English: "Is a Purely Procedural Theory of Justice Possible? John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*"⁷⁷⁶ (written in 1990) and the other, "After Rawls's *Theory of Justice*"⁷⁷⁷ which was written in 1995, focuses on the developments taken by Rawls's theory after his 1971 seminal book.

Throughout these articles, the tone is always more or less the same, and some topics and passages are repeated. The fact that they were written in a 7-year period accounts for some stability in Ricœur's position concerning Rawls. In all of them, Ricœur praises Rawls's deontological approach and its normative moment. However, he also reproaches its occlusion of the substantive good. Let us recall that in the meantime Ricœur published *Oneself as Another*. A large part of these articles is merely introductory to Rawls's thought. Ricœur, in fact, did much to introduce the Rawlsian theory of justice in France, much like he had done for so many other authors and strands before. I will skip those parts, because the main traits of this theory have already been briefly recalled in the preceding pages. As such, I will concentrate on the objections.

Three of these articles deal with *The Theory of Justice*. In "De l'autonomie morale à la fiction du contrat social" Ricœur reproaches Rawls for having a "very limited" notion of what a teleological standpoint can be.⁷⁷⁸ Indeed,

Réflexions sur le lien entre principes et institutions" both in *Philosophy Today*, *Ricœur, Justice and Institutions / Ricœur, la Justice et les institutions*, edited by Gonçalo Marcelo (2014, forthcoming).

⁷⁷⁴ Ricœur, "John Rawls: de l'autonomie morale à la fiction du contrat social" (1990) in *Lectures I*, *op. cit.*, pp. 196-216.

⁷⁷⁵ Ricœur, "Le cercle de la démonstration" (1988) in *Lectures I*, pp. 217-231.

⁷⁷⁶ Ricœur, "Is a Purely Procedural Theory of Justice Possible? John Rawls's *Theory of Justice*" in *The Just*, translated by David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2000), pp. 36-57.

⁷⁷⁷ Ricœur, "After Rawls's *Theory of Justice*", in *The Just*, pp. 58-75.

⁷⁷⁸ Ricœur, "De l'autonomie morale à la fiction du contrat social", *op. cit.*, p. 201.

he thinks that Rawls's argument is only directed against a particular teleological version of justice, namely, the utilitarian view, and he considers that there might be a way to reconcile a teleological strive for the good with Rawls's deontological point of view. He considers that Rawls's whole book can be taken as a contractualist reactualization of the Kantian principle of autonomy, aiming to adapt it to an institutional level.⁷⁷⁹ Ricœur's main objection consists in noting that Rawls's procedural method is a fiction and that at most, what it can do is to formalize a "sense of justice which is always presupposed."⁷⁸⁰ That is, there is always a pre-comprehension of justice put forward by social actors, which the veil of ignorance cannot hide. He thus considers the Rawlsian reflective equilibrium as being more realistic than the original position, which is to be discarded. His conclusion is that if, on the one hand, moral autonomy can be considered, within the Kantian framework, a fact of reason⁷⁸¹, the social contract is nothing but a fiction. As such, he argues, a suitable social theory needs to be grounded in the "desire to live together", and not in a fictional pact. Ricœur does not ignore the situations of asymmetric power and domination in society. They stem, he argues, from a possible forgetting of this "desire to live together"; as such, in order to overcome domination, that is, to retransform power-over in power-in-common, what we need is a rekindling of that desire to live together.

This diagnosis bearing on Rawls's early method leads Ricœur to conclude that there is a circle in Rawls's presentation of his argument in the *Theory of Justice*. Thus in "Le cercle de la démonstration" Ricœur proceeds to show how Rawls's principles of justice have no independence and validity in themselves and that they derive mainly from our "considered convictions". Ricœur notes that it is puzzling that Rawls chooses to define justice as a virtue of social institutions instead of starting from intersubjective relations.⁷⁸² He challenges Rawls's method of lexical ordering of his principles of justice.⁷⁸³ To reiterate, he argues that what matters are our "considered convictions" and not the original situation.⁷⁸⁴ Ultimately, and even though he sees a usefulness in Rawls's universalization principles, he argues that the way to test those convictions, to, let us say, "consider

⁷⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 203.

⁷⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 209.

⁷⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 213.

⁷⁸² Ricœur, "Le cercle de la démonstration", p. 218.

⁷⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 221.

⁷⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 224.

them” might be done through a recourse to argumentation and discourse, as we see in the proposals of Habermas and Apel.⁷⁸⁵ Ultimately, refusing the strict formalization put forward by Rawls, he proposes that his principles, and for instance the maximin, be interpreted in prudential terms, and he provides the example of the golden rule. Hence, the maximin is something recommended by our own intuitive sense of justice, and not by detached rules.⁷⁸⁶ In the conclusion to this article, Ricœur argues that moral theory does not “institute anything *ex nihilo*”⁷⁸⁷; rather, it only justifies our common moral convictions. With this last remark, we can anticipate how close Ricœur will be to Walzer’s own standpoint, which we will follow in more detail in the next section.

In “Is a Purely Procedural Theory of Justice Possible?” Ricœur reasserts the dependence of the deontological rule upon the non-formalized prudential golden rule. To reiterate, his thesis is “that a procedural conception of justice at best provides a rationalization of a sense of justice that is always presupposed.”⁷⁸⁸ In “After Rawls’s *Theory of Justice*” Ricœur emphasizes the communitarian critique concerning the a-historical status of Rawls’s fictional pact, and the fact that it cannot bind historical societies.⁷⁸⁹ But he chooses to emphasize the connection between the reflective equilibrium and the overlapping consensus. He notes that “*A Theory of Justice* does not say what considered convictions satisfied the conditions for reflective equilibrium.”⁷⁹⁰ Ricœur asks from where does the motivation from the moral capacity come from, and he states that without the overlapping consensus, all Rawls’s theory has to offer is “a strategy of *avoiding* controversies”.⁷⁹¹ He argues that we have to take “professed beliefs” that is, in Rawls’s vocabulary, “comprehensive doctrines” as more than mere prejudices or survivals from the past.⁷⁹² Ricœur thinks that the overlapping consensus is Rawls’s best solution for the political problem. But he does emphasize, much more than Rawls, the role of beliefs, convictions and “comprehensive theories”. He also insists, much more than Rawls, that we need to take the problem of domination

⁷⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 229.

⁷⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 230.

⁷⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

⁷⁸⁸ Ricœur, “Is a Purely Procedural Theory of Justice Possible?”, p. 50.

⁷⁸⁹ Ricœur, “After Rawls’s *Theory of Justice*”, p. 67.

⁷⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁷⁹¹ *Ibid.*

⁷⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 73.

and even State coercion into account. And, as I stated before, he grounds Rawls's deontological moment in the teleological moment and formalized rules in prudential, pre-deontological rules.

As we can see, in his critiques of Rawls, Ricœur borrows many of the objections made by those who adopt a communitarian viewpoint (whether or not they assume it for themselves). In the following section and in the next chapter I will turn to authors, like Walzer and Taylor, who provided thicker accounts of the good. Ultimately, they do not ignore pluralism, or maybe even give a more substantive description of what is at stake in the pluralistic landscape of a wide range of diverging positions, all with different conceptions and thick identity claims. As will ultimately be apparent, Ricœur will be somewhere between the two positions. But let me first briefly mention the contributions of Walzer and Boltanski / Thévenot, in which Ricœur saw a description of the plurality of instances of justice that ultimately provided a counterweight to Rawls's unified account of justice, before mentioning the ultimate configuration this all assumes for Ricœur.

2.2.2 – Walzer: complex equality and the irreducible plurality of goods

Michael Walzer's *Spheres of Justice*⁷⁹³ is probably the best account of pluralism that we can find in contemporary political philosophy. As I will argue later, Walzer's insights are also valuable for the construction of a critical social philosophy, in that he takes the defense of democracy and the plurality of goods over against the possibilities of dominance or monopoly of one good over the others, as it seems to be many times the case in contemporary societies.

Walzer argues for what he calls complex equality in chapter one of his book. In a way, only the first and the last chapters⁷⁹⁴ are somewhat systematic, spelling out the way only complex equality is, in his view, able to sufficiently ground the criteria able to safeguard the existence of a truly democratic society. What all the other eleven chapters do is to engage in substantive and sometimes

⁷⁹³ Michael Walzer, *Spheres of Justice. A Defense of Pluralism and Equality* (New York: Basic Books, 1983).

⁷⁹⁴ See chapter 13, "Tyrannies and Just Societies", pp. 312-321.

historical discussions of everything that can be considered as social goods⁷⁹⁵ and the way in which complex equality in the distribution of these goods might (or might not) be envisioned.

To be clear, Walzer is a fierce defender of equality. But he also understands that one has to be careful when defining it, in order to avoid its perils. In fact, he opens up the book in a somewhat polemic manner, asserting that “equality literally understood is an ideal ripe for betrayal.”⁷⁹⁶ Why betrayal? Because inequality is natural in terms of talents and capacities, and different people come to fill different roles; fully trying to make people equal on all accounts, even in terms of the roles they fulfill, would probably result in tyranny. However, he argues that there must be a way to bring about equality in a democratic way.

Walzer therefore chooses to concentrate on social goods, much like Rawls. He asserts that “we have to understand and control social goods; we do not have to stretch or shrink human beings.”⁷⁹⁷ This, in turn, entails the main thesis of the book: that no social good, natural or acquired, provided by nature, nurture, or sheer work or force of will, can serve as a means of domination. He thus wants to put forward an egalitarianism that is consistent with liberty⁷⁹⁸, and the way he finds to do it is by developing an “art of differentiation”⁷⁹⁹ which, adopting a purely historical and particularistic standpoint, describes the plurality of goods we come to recognize in our societies. The standpoint is particularistic because it is grounded in our own contingent values, those that have come about in a historical way in our particular societies. Differently from Rawls, Walzer has no interest in trying to provide a tendentially universalistic model. Even if Rawls admits that his own model applies mainly, or even exclusively, to liberal societies, there is always the tendency to try to export his proceduralist approach elsewhere; we find no such tendency in Walzer.

That said, I do not think we can speak of a purely relativist approach either; I am more inclined to detect a certain perspectivism in it, whereby we adopt

⁷⁹⁵ The list of these goods that is presented by Walzer includes membership, security and welfare, money and commodities, office, hard work, free time, kinship and love, divine grace, recognition, and political power.

⁷⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. xi.

⁷⁹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. xiii.

⁷⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. xiv.

⁷⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. xv.

a certain value and defend it as being appropriate to us – “us” having the possibility of encompassing the society in which we live, in this case – without necessarily positing its universal validity or possibility of application elsewhere. As such, the “art of differentiation” will be accompanied by a strict positing of the frontiers of the social goods in question, and even their inconvertibility. This is, in Walzer, the key to maintain an equilibrium between democracy and equality. But let us follow the argument more closely.

One important aspect to note is that Walzer considers the meanings attached to social goods as being an integral part of them; this means that social “goods” are not really “good” in themselves, but because of the meaning we attach to them. They are relative, as we shall see in the next section, to what we can call a certain “standing”. This is very easy to understand and acknowledge; social goods like hard work, free time, or even education can be more or less appreciated in different societies, and in different points in time. He puts forward some strong claims in this matter: that there is no single set of primary or basic goods conceivable across all moral and material worlds⁸⁰⁰ and that social meanings change over time.⁸⁰¹ The consequence is that Walzer chooses interpretation, and not “discovery” or “invention” as the main tool of social analysis; he spells out this claim clearly in *Interpretation and Social Criticism*.⁸⁰²

Walzer’s conclusion is therefore radically pluralist:

When meanings are distinct, distributions must be autonomous. Every social good or set of goods constitutes, at it were, a distributive sphere within which only certain criteria and arrangements are appropriate.⁸⁰³

But this autonomy is obviously always at risk of being infringed upon in the daily functioning of our societies. In fact, states Walzer, the violations are systematic. He distinguishes between two types of violations: 1) Dominance: that is, the use of a good to command a wide range of other goods; or, even worse, 2) Monopoly: owning or controlling social goods in order to exploit their dominance. For

⁸⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

⁸⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

⁸⁰² See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1987), especially chapter 1, “Three Paths in Moral Philosophy”, pp. 1-32.

⁸⁰³ Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 10.

instance, if goods are scarce, dominance will, *eo ipso*, entail monopoly. However, often things are murkier.

Usually, the phenomena of dominance are more frequent than those of monopoly. Monopoly situations, when they happen, are blatant. Dominance, by contrast, can work in the shadows. Walzer cites land ownership, religious or political office, capital and technical knowledge as examples, among others, of social goods that in a certain period were considered as being *the* valuable social good. The consequence of possessing such a social good in those occasions is explained in a very clear manner by Walzer; if one has it, “then all good things come to those who have the one best thing. Possess that one, and the other come in train.”⁸⁰⁴

It goes without saying that for Walzer both dominance and monopoly are unjust. Like Rawls, he also stresses that what justice deals with are social goods, and also like him, he stresses that distribution is what social conflict is all about. However, some conflicts are more blatant than others. Dominance, in particular, is a shady business, sometimes hard to detect. Walzer is certainly right to point out that in our day and age, and particularly in our Western societies, money (or wealth, or capital, however you might want to put it) tends to become *the* most valuable good. And so he is also right to point out that finding a way to curb its monopoly is probably the way to control the autonomous distribution of social goods. He actually points out that “in practice, breaking the monopoly of money neutralizes its dominance”.⁸⁰⁵

But the overall strategy proposed by Walzer is one of reducing dominance because, ultimately, it is dominance that leads to monopoly; he thus aims at reshaping actually existing institutions. The first step is to assert that no particular good is generally convertible, and his ultimate hope is that this “would open the way for more diffused and particularized forms of social conflict”.⁸⁰⁶

He takes up a Pascalian argument to claim that personal qualities and social goods have their own spheres of operation and that in order to avoid tyranny, the standing of an individual in a particular sphere cannot be transferred to any other. To be sure, Walzer’s argument is not directed against inequality *per*

⁸⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

⁸⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

se; he puts forward the following counterfactual argument: suppose that dominance is eliminated and the autonomy of the spheres established. What if it came to happen that it would be the same people that would conquer a good standing in each individual sphere, “piling up goods without the need for illegitimate conversions?”⁸⁰⁷ This would certainly prove, according to him, that society is and would be inegalitarian; and of course that this success would not be, in itself, illegitimate. But Walzer argues that such an outcome is by and large unlikely and that even if it happened, so long as we do not allow for illegitimate conversion, we will not not fear that a caste of individuals will come and rule the rest of us, because those who will succeed probably change over time.

As such, complex equality would come through what he calls an open-ended distributive principle:

*No social good x should be distributed to men and women who possess some other good y merely because they possess y and without regard to the meaning of x.*⁸⁰⁸

But this distributive principle actually turns out to be itself plural, as Walzer recognizes three legitimate but incomplete distributive principles, which must be combined in order to bring about complex equality: free exchange, desert and need.

Free exchange is, of course, the principle guiding the market. Walzer recalls that it is obviously “open-ended” in that it “creates a market within which all goods are convertible into all other goods through the neutral medium of money”.⁸⁰⁹ In it, at least in principle, there are no dominant goods and no monopolies. Since the value of the goods is intrinsically dependent on social evaluations, it should avoid these situations. However, this is obviously an ideal account of the way in which the market works. How does exchange really take place, according to Walzer?

Money, supposedly the neutral medium, is in practice a dominant good, and it is monopolized by people who possess a special talent for bargaining and trading.⁸¹⁰

⁸⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 20.

⁸⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

⁸¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

The result, then, is a concentration that leaves some unsatisfied and who might call for a redistributive principle; but this is in turn problematic because the former will never want to return to a situation of simple equality.

Walzer's conclusion is that we need to set limits to what can be exchanged for what. He gives the example of political power. If political power is allowed to be bought and sold, the ensuing result is tyranny. And this from the lowest to the highest form. If you want my hat, and I can do without my hat, and if, on the other hand, I value the power of vote more than you, nothing under the principle of free exchange prevents me from trading my hat for the possibility of having two votes instead of one. Walzer concedes that setting up these limits is difficult, because "money seeps across all boundaries"⁸¹¹ but precisely because of its pervasiveness, the setting up of limits is all the more necessary.

As for desert, it seems as open-ended and pluralistic as free exchange. But how are we to determine who deserves what and in under what circumstances? If I am a charming man, maybe I deserve to be loved. But by whom, and to what extent? Or person x is an interesting and stimulating person; maybe she deserves to be influential. But who is to decide what kind of role she will play? Ultimately, Walzer argues, "only God would be able to make the necessary distributions" of goods such as love, influence, offices, and so on, according to a principle of desert.⁸¹² Even if we were capable of putting in place such a system, Walzer contends, it would probably be seized by a group of aristocrats claiming to be the sole possessors of the criteria of excellence, and the principle would cease to be pluralistic and open-ended anyway.

The third criterion is the one of need. Walzer invokes Marx's maxim: to each according to his needs. This might seem an obvious criterion when what we are talking about are physical needs, or the means of subsistence. But the principle is less clear, Walzer claims, when it is applied to other social goods.⁸¹³ Do we "need" a certain job, or political office, as badly as we need food, shelter, and so on? Maybe we need recognition, but when it comes in the form of honor, do we need it as badly as we need, for instance, love and approbation? This means that

⁸¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

⁸¹² *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁸¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

each of these spheres is a particular sphere, separate from all the others. As Walzer states: “Needed goods distributed to needy people in proportion to their neediness are obviously not dominated by any other goods”.⁸¹⁴ However, it will be precisely this fact of the heterogeneity of goods that will lead Walzer to his radically pluralistic account of social goods:

But we can now see, I think, that every criterion that has any force at all meets the general rule within its own sphere, and not elsewhere. This is the effect of the rule: different goods to different companies of men and women for different reasons and in accordance with different procedures. And to get all this right, or to get it roughly right, is to map out the entire social world.⁸¹⁵

Evidently, Michael Walzer is not capable of mapping out the entire social world. However, we can now understand what he means by complex equality. According to his definition:

In formal terms, complex equality means that no citizen’s standing in one sphere or with regard to one social good can be undercut by his standing in some other sphere, with regard to some other good.⁸¹⁶

This means that even if I have money, that possession should not entail that I necessarily deserve political clout, or vice-versa. Having education is not tantamount to acquiring recognition, and so on.

In the rest of the book, what Walzer attempts to do is therefore to describe in an isolated manner, with no particular order, the different highly regarded social goods and the spheres they form. He concedes that his approach is phenomenological in character. That is, it is descriptive and even though he tries to reconstruct the normative functioning of each particular sphere, he does not follow a system of priorities like the lexical order assumed by Rawls. As such, in the conflict about the distribution or redistribution of social goods, he takes a radically pluralistic stance. His analyses ultimately aim at defining the shape of our societies and the way different goods should or should not be distributed

⁸¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

⁸¹⁵ *Ibid.*

⁸¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

within it. I will not delve in the details of each particular sphere described by Walzer.

Instead I will only mention a few of the main general traits that his theory ultimately assumes. These are provided in the last chapter of *Spheres of Justice*. Eventually, Walzer gives a substantive account of societies; hence, his phenomenological and historical descriptions. According to him, the adjective “just” does not determine the lives of societies; at most, it can modify them. This is a position akin to the one defended by Ricœur. For Walzer, “A given society is just if its substantive life is lived in a certain way – that is, in a way faithful to the shared understandings of the members.”⁸¹⁷ And this is crucial because, to reiterate, since the value of goods is attributed in a social manner, it is precisely the shared understanding of members of society that will grant value upon things and roles.

One very important aspect to highlight, and which brings Walzer to the neighborhood of Ricœur, is that his conception of social justice is hermeneutic. That much is apparent already in *The Spheres of Justice*: “We are (all of us) culture-producing creatures; we make and inhabit meaningful worlds.”⁸¹⁸ In *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, he makes even more explicit how his model of social analysis is hermeneutical, and how it departs from other possible methods for social criticism.⁸¹⁹ For Walzer, there are three main “paths in moral philosophy”: discovery, invention and interpretation. Discovery refers to the social and critical approaches that appeal to an experience of religious or cognitive clarity in order to advance a socially closed realm of generally binding values. This is, in short, a kind of Platonism. Invention is the type of approach that starts by looking for a generally valid procedure and then tries to apply these norms to already existing societies. Finally, interpretation is to be understood as the hermeneutic dimension of the creative disclosure of existing cultural values and ideals.

Walzer illustrates this alternative by means of an analogy: Discovery resembles the work of the executive: to find, proclaim and then enforce the law. Invention is legislative: it is the work of “representative men and women, who

⁸¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

⁸¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

⁸¹⁹ This next page has been republished from a part of an article I published before. See Gonçalo Marcelo, *Making Sense of the Social. Hermeneutics and Social Philosophy* in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol. 3, nr. 1 (2012): 74-75.

stand for us all because they could be any one of us.”⁸²⁰ Finally, interpretation is to be understood as a judgment, the work of the judicial branch of government. Walzer’s description of these three alternative paths does not intend to be exhaustive. In a way, he is only sketching ideal-types, useful to roughly understand the most important characteristics of what he takes to be the more common approaches of social criticism. Nonetheless, far from limiting himself to a merely descriptive approach, he forcefully makes the case for the choice of one these criticisms. For Walzer, “the claim of interpretation is simply this: that neither discovery nor invention is necessary because we already possess what they pretend to provide.”⁸²¹

According to Walzer, the moralities we discover or invent actually turn out to be remarkably close to those *we already have*. Usually, what we do when we engage in a discussion on morality is to use already-existing moral concepts and intuitions. Accordingly, social criticism is more likely to draw a thick description of moral norms and social realities, rather than discovering them somewhere or inventing them altogether. What constitutes the moral life of a given society or group within it? Its historic ideals, public rhetoric, foundational texts, ceremonies and rituals. Walzer states that “it’s not only what people do but how they explain and justify what they do, the stories they tell, the principles they invoke, that constitute a moral culture.”⁸²² And what is striking is that these are not mere facts that could be rendered by a purely descriptivist or positivistic approach. This is not to say that the best morality is the one that already exists, or that the social critic should be equated with a policeman of morality or a moral conservative. Rather, these “moral facts”, adds Walzer, have to be “read, rendered, construed, glossed, elucidated, and not merely described.”⁸²³ Thus, such a “moral fact” can be justified or not according to what we make of it, to the interpretation we offer of it. The social critic will sometimes confirm and sometimes challenge received opinion. Moral life is, we could say in Ricoeurian terms, subject to a “conflict of interpretations.”⁸²⁴ Later, he will refine his examples and provide

⁸²⁰ See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p. 19.

⁸²¹ *Ibid.*

⁸²² *Ibid.*, p. 29.

⁸²³ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁴ In what concerns the similarities between Walzer’s depiction of this web of moral notions and Ricoeurian hermeneutics, it is striking to see that Walzer seems to accept a certain version of the

more arguments to defend his “thick” ethical theory.⁸²⁵

In *The Spheres of Justice* he insists that a theory of justice must be alert to differences and sensitive to boundaries.⁸²⁶ This does not necessarily entail the appearance of more just societies. But in those societies, Walzer argues, justice will have more scope:

It doesn’t follow from the theory, however, that societies are more just if they are more differentiated. Justice simply has more scope in such societies, because there are more distinct goods, more distributive principles, more agents, more procedures. And the more scope justice has, the more certain it is that complex equality will be the form that justice takes.⁸²⁷

This is, for Walzer, the core of a democratic society, and the exact opposite of tyranny. When spheres are autonomous (which is not the case, for instance, in a caste society) the exercise of tyranny entails intrigue and violence, and is thus more easily detectable and hopefully curtailed. Walzer defines tyranny as “a continual grabbing of things that don’t come naturally, an unrelenting struggle to rule outside one’s own company”.⁸²⁸ According to Walzer, “contemporary tyrants are endlessly busy”⁸²⁹ because the differentiation makes the reach of their power harder to penetrate in all the spheres, whether it is courts, bureaucracy, citizens associations, and so forth. This, Walzer hopes, serves as a deterrent to tyrannical exercise of power. As for the phenomenon of totalitarianism, he asserts that it corresponds to some sort of “perfection of injustice”. There, the tyranny is unmistakable but there is nothing for the theory of justice to do, except to repudiate it. For Walzer, complex equality is the exact opposite of

model of the text, not necessarily as applied to action, but to morality: “moral interpretation will sometimes confirm and sometimes challenge received opinion. And if we disagree with either the confirmation or the challenge, there is nothing to do but to go back to the “text”, the values, principles, codes, and conventions that constitute the moral world – and to the “readers” of the text. The readers, I suppose, are the effective authority: we hold up our interpretations for their approval. But the matter is not closed if they do not approve. For readers are also rereaders who change their minds, and the population of readers also changes. We can always renew the argument.” See Walzer, *Interpretation and Social Criticism*, p. 30.

⁸²⁵ See Michael Walzer, *Thick and Thin. Moral Argument at Home and Abroad* (Notre Dame: University of Notre Dame Press, 1994).

⁸²⁶ Walzer, *Spheres of Justice*, p. 315.

⁸²⁷ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁸ *Ibid.*

⁸²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

totalitarianism.⁸³⁰

Accordingly, for him, totalitarianism as the extreme form of tyranny and consequently as also the extreme form of coordination, is the worse of political evils. However, more pervasive and widespread is the dominance of money, and the power it procures:

Contemporary forms of egalitarian politics have their origin in the struggle against capitalism and the particular tyranny of money. And surely in the United States today it is the tyranny of money that most clearly invites resistance: property/power rather than power itself.⁸³¹

Hence, and because what Walzer is striving for is, after all, (complex) equality, he does not stop short from suggesting that there is something we might do about this. He is, actually, a *connected critic*, such as those he calls for in *Interpretation and Social Criticism*. Evoking John Kenneth Galbraith, he calls for the mobilization of “countervailing powers”. That is, if his theory is a theory of limits, of boundaries strictly separating social goods, and “since armies of ambitions men and women push forward from one side of the boundary, what we require are similar armies pushing forward from the other side.”⁸³² Now, this is social criticism with a practical intent, if there ever was one.

Walzer’s aim, as is easy to grasp, is for this movement to reinstate the real autonomy of distributive spheres. In a formulation that would be unacceptable if it applied to people and their movements, but which makes sense when applied to his spheres of justice, he states: “Good fences make just societies”.⁸³³ He thus proposes that we undertake a work of vigilance. But this, however, without a guarantee of results: “Eternal vigilance is no guarantee of eternity”.⁸³⁴

Ultimately, and over against Rawls’s overcautious ideal standpoint, Walzer does not refrain from putting forward his own model of political organization and concrete arrangements. According to him:

The appropriate arrangements in our own society are those, I think, of a decentralized

⁸³⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸³¹ *Ibid.*

⁸³² *Ibid.*, pp. 316-317.

⁸³³ *Ibid.*, p. 319.

⁸³⁴ *Ibid.*

democratic socialism; a strong welfare state run, in part at least, by local and amateur officials; a constrained market; an open and demystified civil service; independent public schools; the sharing of hard work and free time; the protection of religious and familial life; a system of public honoring and dishonoring free from all considerations of rank and class; workers' control of companies and factories; a politics of parties, movements, meetings, and public debate.⁸³⁵

We can of course agree or disagree with this set of particular arrangements. We can put forward arguments defending or attacking some of these arrangements, or all of them. I will not pursue such a debate here. But at least Walzer has the merit of putting forward a thick description, not an ultimately vague and disconnected model, such as Rawls's.

Allow me to subscribe to Walzer's assertion concerning the risk of plutocracy and the dominance of money. At the time Walzer was thinking and writing the book (roughly the 1970s and early 1980s) inequality, money dominance and market deregulation were arguably still at very low levels if we compare it with what happened afterwards and is still happening today. In fact, the effects of systemic deregulation and the growth of the financial sector out of proportions were a movement partly motivated by political measures taken by Thatcher and Reagan whose overblown effect was only felt in 2007 with the eruption of the latest financial crisis.

Likewise, the invasion of the economic sphere unto the political sphere, with its particular mix of private interests and decisions with public consequences, is arguably greater today than at the time of Walzer's writing, and no lesser in Europe than in the United States. As such, and if we agree with his vision of the connected critic and the thick theory of justice – I happen to agree with it – than the duty of critical vigilance and reflection on these matters is today even more urgent than it was when *The Spheres of Justice* was published. Following a similar lead, Michael Sandel recently undertook a forceful critique of the commodification in our everyday lives in his *What Money Can't Buy*.⁸³⁶ I do think that this is one of today's critical tasks, and I will come back to it in part eighth of this thesis.

⁸³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

⁸³⁶ See Michael Sandel, *What Money Can't Buy: The Moral Limits of Markets* (London: Penguin, 2013).

As for Ricœur, he proposes to read Walzer's theory of justice as a privileged example of intrastate differentiation of generative instances of right, or justice. As such, Ricœur finds in it a good complement and counterweight to Rawls's abstract and procedural theory. However, in an important article republished in *The Just* and that I will follow as a guiding thread, he proposes to read it in connection with Luc Boltanski's and Laurent Thévenot's *On Justification*. Consequently, I will postpone Ricœur's assessment of Walzer to the end of next section, where it will come by way of a comparative analysis between his theory of justice, and Boltanski and Thévenot's sociology of critique.

2.2.3 – Boltanski and Thévenot: the multiple orders of worth, strategies of justification, and the exercise of critique

The publication in 1991 of *On Justification: Economies of Worth*⁸³⁷ assumed the status of a true event, in the strong sense of this term, in French sociology. Sociology plays an enormous theoretical role in France, perhaps an even more important role than it does in Germany. For a very long time, the main developments in this field were coalesced around the imposing figure of Pierre Bourdieu. Bourdieu, of course, played a crucial part in the development of the social sciences, and of sociology in particular, and introduced such important notions as those of habitus, or symbolic violence. He was particularly interested in the analysis of power relations, and in the conditions of domination and emancipation thereof.

His standpoint has sometimes been described as one of “critical sociology” or a “sociology of emancipation”, in that the social theorist is somewhat disconnected from the standpoint assumed by social actors. That is, by adopting a “scientific” point of view he is supposed to somehow see beyond what ordinary people experience in their daily lives; to go beyond the distortion that somehow afflicts ordinary consciousness and to lead the way, through critique, to a possible liberation from those conditions.

⁸³⁷ See Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification: Economies of Worth*, translated by Catherine Porter (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2006).

This project has some affinities with Critical Theory⁸³⁸ but it is actually more ambitious (perhaps overambitious?) in what comes down to the role played by the social critic; indeed, it is not without reminding us of Althusser and his “epistemological break”. Over against this emphasis, and partly as a movement cutting its ties with Bourdieu’s towering influence, Boltanski and Thévenot’s book, which had been preceded by some earlier articles, inaugurated a fresh and original way of doing sociology. Their movement, sometimes described as “pragmatic sociology” or a “sociology of critique” (to mark its distinction from Bourdieu’s “critical sociology”) adopted a somewhat more modest standpoint in what concerned the role of the social scientist. Indeed, they chose to concentrate on the standpoint of actors themselves, and to analyze their vocabulary, their actions, their ways of exerting critique, create meaning or justifying their actions. In this, we might perhaps say that their movement gave some voice to precisely those social actors themselves, not assuming some sort of doubling of consciousness in which the theoretician would necessarily see further and point the way to social actors.

Their research coalesced around a group called the Groupe de Sociologie Politique et Morale (GSPM), whose headquarters was at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). It is hard to say up until what point we could call this movement a “school” because it allowed for many different methodologies, styles and empirical researches within it. However, for around twenty years, it saw the development of such important works as Luc Boltanski’s

⁸³⁸ See Robin Celikates, “Systematic misrecognition and the practice of critique: Bourdieu, Boltanski and the role of critical theory” in *Recognition Theory and Contemporary French Moral and Political Philosophy* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2012), pp. 160-172. Recent Critical Theory, on the other hand, has sometimes been described as being somewhere in between the standpoint of Bourdieu, and that of pragmatic sociologists. Axel Honneth, for his part, even if he is close to Boltanski and his analyzes of the “new spirit of capitalism” (see for instance his interview with me, “Recognition and Critical Theory Today”, *op. cit.*, p. 212) has published a harsh critique of *On Justification*. Honneth argues that if Bourdieu exaggerated on the role of the social theoretician, and saw agents as opaque to themselves, Boltanski and Thévenot in their book commit the opposite exaggeration. That is, Honneth argues that they strip the role of the social critic to such a point in their insistence on the plurality of the orders of justification that “we are presented with an image of a normatively and completely unstructured society”. Therefore, the claim goes, “The tendency toward the dissolution of the moral structures of the social is the danger that the study encounters on nearly every page.” See Honneth, “Dissolutions of the Social: On the Social Theory of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot” in *Constellations* vol. 17, number 3 (2010): 388. I do not think that this critique is entirely fair. But I subscribe, in its main traits, to the standpoint adopted by Critical Theory.

*L'amour et la justice comme compétences*⁸³⁹ and *On Critique*⁸⁴⁰, Luc Boltanski's and Ève Chiapello's *The New Spirit of Capitalism*⁸⁴¹, Laurent Thévenot's *L'action au pluriel*⁸⁴², and Cyril Lemieux's *Le devoir et la grâce*⁸⁴³, to mention only a few of the most important monographs published in this period.⁸⁴⁴

At the moment when I am writing these lines, the research programs of Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot have parted ways, as Boltanski seems to have taken a step back and, since his *On Critique*, partially returned to a “critical sociology”; or, better put, he seems to want to go beyond the alleged rift between “critical sociology”⁸⁴⁵ and the “sociology of critique”. In his new research program, he wants to find a new mixture between overarching critiques (those he calls “critical theories”, and by this he understands the theories of Marx, Bourdieu or those coming from the Frankfurt School) and pragmatic, pluralistic critiques, like those that had been put forward by members of the GSPM in the two preceding decades. Laurent Thévenot, on the other hand, developed a more systematic approach on what he calls the “regimes of engagement” of familiarity, regular planning and justification, which develop his earlier notion of “suitable action” (*l'action qui convient*).

Boltanski's *On Critique* was met with fierce criticism by some within the movement and both the coherence of his standpoint from a diachronic point of view (that is, the relation of his many works) and the feasibility of his proposed program in this book have been disputed.⁸⁴⁶ While I understand and praise the

⁸³⁹ Luc Boltanski, *L'amour et la justice comme compétences. Trois essais de sociologie de l'action* (Paris: Métailié, 1990).

⁸⁴⁰ Luc Boltanski, *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation*, translated by Gregory Elliott (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2011).

⁸⁴¹ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2007).

⁸⁴² Laurent Thévenot, *L'action au pluriel. Sociologie des régimes d'engagement* (Paris: La Découverte, 2006).

⁸⁴³ Cyril Lemieux, *Le devoir et la grâce* (Paris: Economica, 2009).

⁸⁴⁴ For a provisional summing up of the main developments and theoretical discussions of this movement, see *Compétences critiques et sens de la justice*, edited by Marc Breviglieri, Claudette Lafaye and Danny Trom (Paris: Economica, 2009).

⁸⁴⁵ “Critical sociology” is of course a problematic designation and it needs to go through a conceptual clarification if it is to be properly understood. For a critical assessment of this notion, see Jean de Munck, “Les trois dimensions de la sociologie critique” in *SociologieS*, available on-line at <http://sociologies.revues.org/3576>

⁸⁴⁶ For a very harsh criticism of Boltanski's book, see Joan Stavo-Debaugé, “De la critique, une critique. Sur le geste “radical” de Luc Boltanski, in *EspacesTemps.net*, Travaux, 07-03-2011. Available on-line at <http://www.espacestems.net/articles/de-la-critique-une-critique-sur-le-geste-radical-de-luc-boltanski/> For a brief overview of the main developments of the pragmatic sociology movement, including a more sympathetic account of Boltanski's *On Critique*, and a somewhat

pertinence of this movement and their fine and detailed analyzes of action, justification, critique and many other topics, I do not have a particular desire to enter this debate in a polemic manner, nor do I have a particular tendency to see their respective standpoints as being irreconcilable. In what comes down to Boltanski's *On Critique*, I praise the gesture of trying to reconcile in a creative manner "critical sociologies" and namely "critical theories" with the pragmatic analyzes of action, while I also recognize a certain descriptive deficit and obviously a contradiction with previous works, two problems identified by Stavo-Debauge.

One important aspect to mention, also so that it can be understood why I am including a discussion of these developments in this thesis, is that this was a movement that from the start was heavily influenced by Ricœur, and which also, in turn, influenced Ricœur. There was thus an interesting reciprocal interaction and fertile discussion whose steps I will not analyze in detail, but which deserves to be mentioned. In *The Just*, Ricœur included an important analysis of *On Justification* and in *The Course of Recognition* Ricœur again drew on their analyzes, as well as on Boltanski's *L'amour et la justice comme compétences* when preparing his discussion of *agape* and the states of peace which provide him with an alternative model for recognition, different from the Honnethian model of the struggle for recognition.

Boltanski and Thévenot, for their part, explicitly recognize the influence of Ricœur in the theoretical framework of pragmatic sociology.⁸⁴⁷ Thévenot mentions the mark of Ricœur in topics like the interpretation of action and texts (important for their depiction of the pragmatic regimes⁸⁴⁸), the analysis of persons, agency and identities⁸⁴⁹ and the fertility Ricœur's works had for a whole group of researchers, from Marc Breviglieri's analysis of inhabiting, to Stavo-Debauge's take on hospitality and belonging, not forgetting Luca Pattaroni's analysis of

ironic (or at least humorous) take on the whole polemic turn this has taken, see also Philippe Corcuff, "Style de théorie, statut de la critique et approche des institutions" Working paper CrIDIS n.º 28 (Mai 2011), available on-line at http://www.uclouvain.be/cps/ucl/doc/cr-ridis/documents/_WP_28_Philippe_Corcuff.pdf

⁸⁴⁷ See "L'effet Ricœur dans les sciences humaines. Table ronde avec Luc Boltanski, François Dosse, Michaël Foessel, François Hartog, Patrick Pharo, Louis Quéré, Laurent Thévenot" in *Esprit* "La pensée Ricœur" n.º 323 (mars-avril 2006): 43-67.

⁸⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 47.

⁸⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 48.

responsibility.⁸⁵⁰ Boltanski, for his part, emphasizes how the reading of Ricœur's works from the early 1980s onwards helped him to transpose an hermeneutic model to sociology, a model of reconstruction of meaning which allowed for an alternative to the hermeneutics of suspicion.⁸⁵¹ Ultimately, as of today, a part of these researchers is still actively looking at Ricœur's works for inspiration, transposing and further developing some of his intuitions to social theory.⁸⁵²

As for me, to reiterate, my own standpoint is one of a political and social philosophy simultaneously inspired by Critical Theory and by Ricœur's philosophy, and namely his ethical insights and hermeneutic methodology. Since I am not a sociologist myself, I am in no position to evaluate the methodologies put forward by pragmatic sociologists themselves. However, their fine analyzes of action, critiques, justification and so forth provide me with a descriptive content which is useful for my own standpoint. I will refrain from analyzing all the meaningful debates taking place within this movement, for lack of space. I will thus restrain myself to mentioning the main theses of the founding book, *On Justification*, and then mention some of the very interesting analyzes that we can find in Boltanski and Chiapello's *New Spirit of Capitalism*, because they provide a glimpse at how a critique of some of the procedures of late capitalism might be put forward, which is an important task to which I will come back in part eight of this thesis. The analysis of *On Justification* will provide a glimpse on the topic of conflict and compromise that was emphasized by Ricœur, as well as a continuation of the conflict between Rawls's universalistic standpoint and the plurality of instantiations of justice.

On Justification is a book that revolves around the competences of social actors. The authors decide to analyze the "operations of qualification" among social actors, that is, how people do things such as compare and establish hierarchies. In order to do that, they directed their attention towards several "orders of generality", each of which with a particular kind of "worth" and

⁸⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

⁸⁵² Allow me to mention Thévenot's and Breviglieri's contributions to a recent number of *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* on social analysis, organized by Anna Borisenkova. See Laurent Thévenot, "Des Institutions en Personne. Une sociologie pragmatique en dialogue avec Paul Ricœur" in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol. 3, n.° 1 (2012): 11-33 and Marc Breviglieri, "L'espace habité que réclame l'assurance intime de pouvoir. Un essai d'approfondissement sociologique de l'anthropologie capacitaire de Paul Ricœur" in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol. 3, n.° 1 (2012): 34-52.

conferring upon social actors a certain “standing”. Describing their methodology, they emphasize that they had to be attentive to their descriptive language in order to avoid transforming observation into critique.⁸⁵³ That is, the type of critical exercises, arguments, justifications and so forth that will appear in the book are those that social actors use. As they put it, theirs is a “way of constructing generality – and thus of supporting justifications and critiques – that is not unfamiliar to the actors themselves.”⁸⁵⁴ This data, in turn, is organized according to a certain typology. But this typology is nothing more than a collection of ideal-types, that is, sets of normative models that they put forward, following an inspiration from classical works of political philosophy.

These models will thus be found in the classical political philosophies that attempted to describe the common good by placing different goods at the top of their hierarchy. Hence, in chapter four of the second part of their book⁸⁵⁵ they list the main forms of “polities”, each of which assuming a different type of worth. Their initial list comprises the inspired polity (based on Augustine), whose members derive their worth from acceptance of God’s grace; the market polity, based on Adam Smith, praising market value and free exchange; the domestic polity (based on Bossuet, worth depending upon a hierarchy in a chain of personal dependencies); the polity of fame (based on Hobbes’s depiction of honor, worth depending on “fame”; the civic polity (worth deriving from an impersonal sovereign made up by the convergence of human wills, that is, a model stemming from Rousseau’s social contract theory); and the industrial polity, inspired by Saint-Simon, and where what counts is production and efficacy.

All these polities, in turn, lead them to model six different “worlds” (*cités*), where the values put forward by the polities organize a specific way of living together. These will thus be the inspired world, the domestic world, the world of fame, the civic world, the market world and the industrial world. In 1999, Boltanski and Chiapello would add a seventh world, namely, the “projective world” (where what matters is organization in projects). We can ask whether or not there is a certain degree of arbitrariness in this coupling of ordinary action, and hierarchization with these specific notions in classical political philosophy. Why

⁸⁵³ Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot, *On Justification*, p. 10.

⁸⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

⁸⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 83-123.

these “worlds” and not a number of any others? Why these authors and notions, and why not others? Why draw on Hobbes, for instance, when dealing with a notion close to recognition, and not Hegel? However, this is not, in itself, an objection. It goes without saying that the authors found the normative models that best suited the modes of hierarchization and organization they had found in everyday, ordinary interaction. They explain their method as follows:

We treat the works we have selected as grammatical enterprises intended to clarify and fix rules for reaching agreement, that is, both as polity and as models of the shared *competence* required of persons in order for agreement to be possible. We use these works to develop a model of legitimate order – termed the *polity* model – that spells out the requirement a *higher common principle* must satisfy in order to sustain *justifications*.⁸⁵⁶

This passage contains, in a nutshell, the core methodology of the book. They in fact assume that actors possess these competences and that they implicitly resort to these models when discussing and trying to reach common agreement.

Now, this is an important part of the book. In a way, what Boltanski and Thévenot want to put forward is a radically plural account of the way in which “fitness or rightness is expressed” (fitness here being *suitability*). This is why there are in the book different forms of generality, each of which can justify an action. By spelling out these different ways to specify the common good they are close to Michael Walzer, which is an influence they explicitly acknowledge.⁸⁵⁷ But they do not simply acknowledge this plurality. In fact, a central claim of the book resides in their belief that social actors can navigate throughout these different worlds and appeal to different forms of justification according to the situation in which they happen to be. And the radical consequence of that plurality (in the triple sense of the plurality of worlds, the plurality of situations faced by social actors, and their capacity to appeal to the different forms of generality and hierarchization which leads to a plurality of forms of agreement) is that there might be an intrinsic conflict between these principles in the justifications of action put forward in each case.

One of the reasons why these authors and particularly this book is very

⁸⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 66.

⁸⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

important for this thesis is that these authors want to take into account both conflict and agreement (or consensus, or, in a modified form, *compromise*). In this, they can, albeit in a superficial manner merely tied to nomenclature, be compared with Rawls and his conflictual-consensual approach to society. However, their means are radically different, not only because they are more pluralistic and offer thicker accounts than Rawls does (so they are closer to Walzer) but also because their method has sociological pertinence.

But this interaction between conflict and consensus is programmatically asserted; they explicitly claim:

There is no reason to maintain a radical opposition between sociologies of consensus and sociologies of conflict, although they derive from quite different traditions.

(...)

We seek to embrace the various constructs within a more general model, and to show how each one integrates, in its own way, the relation between moments of agreement reaching and moments of critical questioning.⁸⁵⁸

In what aims to be a very integrative approach, they also seek to go beyond strictly “individual” or “collective” explanations of action.⁸⁵⁹ Their emphasis will be on conventions, that is, something which is social in its core but that is only validated if and when the individual social actors resort to it.

This is indeed a complex model. But it only is so, it can be argued, because it aims to reflect the structure of what are in themselves complex societies.⁸⁶⁰ There is conflict because if people need to justify their actions against a normative backdrop and if there are a plurality of principles among which they can move, when there is juxtaposition of models and when different people are trying to find the right way to justify themselves, these different principles can clash. Accordingly, Boltanski and Thévenot are attentive to different types of conflicts that can appear in everyday interaction: personal interactions, tensions between the public and the private spheres, conflicts in economic relations.⁸⁶¹

⁸⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 25.

⁸⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁸⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 40.

⁸⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

Conflict arises because each of these principles tends to be overarching.⁸⁶² Each of the polities entails not only a principle of worth but also a needed sacrifice for the common good.⁸⁶³ In this way, and this is something Axel Honneth has noted, the polities seem to be all organized by a principle of desert. To be sure, not *all* principles are valid. Boltanski and Thévenot identify the eugenic order as a possible order, but one which is based on an illegitimate value; however, illegitimate values cannot be established in full generality.⁸⁶⁴

Nevertheless, those that can establish such a generality must be tested. In a move that is highly similar to that of Ricœur in *Oneself as Another*, they thus call for a “situated judgment”. As they tell us, “political philosophies remain at the level of principles; they tell us nothing about the conditions under which an actual agreement is reached.”⁸⁶⁵ Polities extend and encompass common worlds insofar as actors situate themselves in those worlds by claiming that in certain circumstances, the *adequate* action, the action that is just, is the one a certain normative principle calls for. But the specific principle to be called for is only decided by such a situated judgment.

How then to decide who’s right, when justifications and normative principles clash? Boltanski and Thévenot argue that people look for a confirmation of their value through “objects”; people “objectify themselves by bringing objects into play and *valorizing* them, that is, endowing them with value”.⁸⁶⁶ This is what attributes a certain consistency to worlds and makes them transcend a pure intersubjective situation. Therefore, when there is disagreement, it is not only the normative principle that will be tested, but in fact the whole stability of the world and “the equitability of the way worths have been distributed in the situation at hand”.⁸⁶⁷ Moreover, each actor will be more or less attached to a specific world (the authors speak here about engagement) according to the position he or she will take, and depending on the hierarchical order promoted by that specific world. And this because each world will value different traits. The inspired world will value inspiration and imagination, people who are passionate, artists, geniuses, and so forth; the domestic world will value family, hierarchy, fidelity; bosses or other

⁸⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

⁸⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 80.

⁸⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 127.

⁸⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

⁸⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 133.

traditional figures will rule. In the world of fame reputation will be the overarching value. Success, “fashion”, soft skills of communication and self-promoting will be the key virtues. In the civic world, what will be valued above all are democratic values, solidarity, and so on. People chosen by the democratic processes of will formation are therefore prone to be valued the most. In the market world what counts is competition and marketability; its heroes will be the businessman, salespeople, the entrepreneur, etc.; as for the industrial world, people who are productive, performative, reliable (in a word, experts) will be the high achievers; finally, in the projective world as it will be defined later, autonomy, creation of webs of interaction where projects will unfold, and so forth will be the key features. As such, the people most likely to succeed are people with the right soft skills, or those who can teach them. Now, each of these capacities has particular tests that validate or invalidate the people who claim to possess these skills. For instance, in the inspired world people will have to demonstrate that they can create, in the market world they will have to prove they can conduct businesses and make sales, in the projective world the worker needs to multitask, find new projects, and so on.

Finally, people can succeed or fail in tests. Boltanski and Thévenot mention the possibility of deficiencies.⁸⁶⁸ For instance, in the industrial world, a worker might point out to a colleague that he does not know how to properly fulfill such and such a task. According to the world in which this conflict takes place, a typology of conflicts is possible. In the domestic world there will be quarrels, breakdowns in the industrial world, social conflicts in the civic world... Ultimately, people are subjected to these tests in a regular basis, and they can either pass or fail them.

Ultimately, we can always ask whether or not Boltanski and Thévenot are a little too optimistic concerning people's capacity to navigate the common worlds. They explicitly acknowledge that they “assume that all persons are inherently endowed with the equipment they need to adapt to situations in each of the worlds we have identified.”⁸⁶⁹ They call this the “arts of living in different worlds” and claim that “normal” people can do it. Those who cannot do it are

⁸⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 134.

⁸⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 145.

deemed “psychologically abnormal”.⁸⁷⁰ Hence, they implicitly assume people’s adaptability. If the first parts of the book define the polities, common worlds and the competences of social actors, from part four onwards the argument will make a further move. Besides from tests that evaluate a given actor’s competence in acquiring worth in each world, they assess the possibility of having two or more worlds colliding. In chapter seven, called “worlds in conflict, judgments in question”⁸⁷¹ they consider the many forms this can assume. Usually, this process appears when a test is contested: false worth conceals deficiency; this, in turn, leads to critique, which calls for a different justification.⁸⁷² Faced with this situation, actors can either avoid it (what the authors call “tactics of disengagement, such as irony, hyperbole, understatement, etc.”⁸⁷³) or try to reach agreement through compromise.

The need for compromise appears because balance needs to be reached:

On the one hand, a constantly repeated critique results in a vain flight into alternative worlds; on the other hand, an excessive identification with the series of objects in the world at hand results in a petrified attachment to a specific worth.⁸⁷⁴

Boltanski and Thévenot thus call for an “opening of our eyes” to plurality. In what they define as prudence (again, and to reiterate, very close to Ricœur) they presuppose that in virtue of our own free will we have the capacity to both go in and out of situations:

A multiworld justice thus presupposes free will on the part of persons who are capable in turn of *closing their eyes* (in order to attend fully to what they are doing in the situations in which they are involved, to resist distractions and engage themselves in the tests that the situations have in store for them) and of *opening their eyes* (in order to challenge the validity of a test and, by breaking free from the grip of the situation, to distinguish beings deriving from other worlds).⁸⁷⁵

⁸⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 215-236.

⁸⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 224.

⁸⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 225.

⁸⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 232.

⁸⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

For these authors there is also, so to speak, a disclosing power of critique. To continue using their metaphor, it is critique that *opens our eyes*. It is because one world is criticized that we detach ourselves from a given situation and are therefore made to recognize that there are *other* worlds, other possibilities to rank priorities and justify what we are doing. It is critique that leads to justification.⁸⁷⁶

Hence, the eighth chapter⁸⁷⁷ of the book is dedicated to the critiques a standpoint based in each of the worlds addresses to the other worlds; more importantly, however, is the authors' assertion that conflicts, critiques and disputes are not unsolvable. Rather, in chapter nine and ten⁸⁷⁸, they display a wide array of forms that compromise for the common good can assume. They call them "compromise formulas". Significantly, they do not posit that a full consensus might be reached. These are "composite arrangements".

In a compromise, people agree to come to terms, that is, to suspend a clash – a dispute involving more than one world – without settling it through recourse to a test in just one of the worlds. The situation remains composite, but a clash is averted. Beings that matter in different worlds are maintained in presence, but their identification does not provoke a dispute.⁸⁷⁹

Significantly, they acknowledge that a compromise can be tacit. That is, an overarching principle ruling the agreement might not be identified. People are "favorably disposed toward the notion of a common good without actively seeking one".⁸⁸⁰ This thus stems from the acceptance of plurality, and the will to cease a dispute. It aims at including *both* of the goods in dispute (and so it is also more than an overlapping consensus, in the Rawlsian definition⁸⁸¹). The authors provide the example of "techniques of creativity", which draws both on the inspired and the industrial worlds. And they emphasize that compromises are fragile. This is important and brings them back to Ricœur once again, because Ricœur always says that mediations are "fragile" and "provisional". The rest of their book is therefore dedicated to the mixed polities that can be reached in states of

⁸⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

⁸⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 237-273.

⁸⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 277-335.

⁸⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 277.

⁸⁸⁰ *Ibid.*

⁸⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 278.

compromise. Some of these compromises will be more suitable than others. Some will have a greater degree of relative stability than others. But it is the principle that is interesting.

Ultimately, Boltanski and Thévenot point towards the possibility of circumstantial agreements. These can evidently fail. There might be a denunciation of the compromise, or a flight from justification. They also mention the possibility of relativization⁸⁸², that is, the attempt to argue that nothing matters, and thus to avoid both justification and agreement. Ultimately, even if theirs is a somewhat radically pluralistic account, it is not a relativistic one, because justification matters. Later, taking up the same vein of pragmatic account, Cyril Lemieux will push further the anti-relativistic stance and try to recover a universalistic stance through a grammatical analysis of action inspired by Wittgenstein and aimed at finding constants in human action that can be properly identified by the social sciences.⁸⁸³

This is, in a condensed manner, Boltanski and Thévenot's early model, which prompted so many fertile, even if sometimes divergent later developments. Allow me now to come back to Ricœur and his assessment of the plural instances of justice.

In *The Just*, and after presenting Rawls's unified, systematic and procedural account of justice, Ricœur includes an article called "The plurality of instances of justice".⁸⁸⁴ In this important article Ricœur sees in Walzer and Boltanski / Thévenot examples of the limitation of a unified form of juridical power and a plea for a differentiation of instances of right. He thus takes up spheres and cities (the French concept is *cités*, translated as *worlds* in the English translation of *On Justification*) as two important projects of pluralization. Ultimately, he thinks they are closely tied together:

There is a kinship between these two projects of pluralizing the idea of justice that brings them close together. We can show this by the implicit borrowings each makes from the other. For example, the notion of social goods develops an internal logic heavily freighted with a prescriptive load (for example, what one does or does not have the right to purchase). In this sense, the notion of a shared understanding links up with that of

⁸⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 339.

⁸⁸³ Cyril Lemieux, *Le devoir et la grâce*, *op. cit.*

⁸⁸⁴ Ricœur, "The Plurality of Instances of Justice" in *The Just*, pp. 76-93.

justification. In an opposite sense, we can say that scales of standing give rise to distributions just like that of social goods. Justification too then has to do with distributive justice. What is more, in both cases it is power, and therefore also satisfaction and enjoyment, that gets distributed. It is true, however, that the gap remains between a project aimed at equality, that is, at the limitation of domination, and one aimed at justification, that is, at a reasonable treatment of opposing claims.⁸⁸⁵

He also sees both these theories as providing practical solutions to specific problems. Walzer aims at curbing dominance and tyranny, whereas Boltanski and Thévenot strive to solve conflicts without resorting to violence.

He recognizes that there are many differences in their respective methodologies too. But he also states that both these works are faced with a similar perplexity: how encompassing can radically pluralistic accounts be? As he puts it, concerning Walzer: “Can a theory exclusively concerned to differentiate spheres avoid the question of integration of these same spheres into a single political body?”⁸⁸⁶ According to Ricœur, there is a fundamental “political paradox” here, that of treating the State in terms of distributive justice.⁸⁸⁷ Ricœur seems to think that insofar as it is political power that allows for the distribution of many other goods, what we should strive to think is rather its self-constitution. Allow me to recall, in passing, that Walzer considers political power as merely one sphere, alongside all the others. This is, for Ricœur, paradoxical.

Turning to Boltanski and Thévenot, he praises their depiction of conflict between different worlds. But, more importantly, he sees in the figures of compromise the overall significance of their work.⁸⁸⁸ However, he asks whether we really can reach some sort of “supercompromise” (what Boltanski and Thévenot call a “compromise for the common good”) precisely because if these theories cannot be overarching, compromises will always remain, as Boltanski and Thévenot admit, fragile. This fragility is very important for Ricœur:

In reading the part of this book devoted to compromise, one gets the impression that compromises are always weaker than the internal bonds of the different cities. The result

⁸⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 82.

⁸⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 88.

⁸⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 89.

⁸⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 90.

is that if some higher common good is affected by the compromise, as a general figure of interaction, it is just as indeterminate as the bond set up by the compromise is fragile. Outside the Utopia of Eden there is only the possibility of dealing with disagreements in terms of compromises always threatened by turning into a compromising of principles, on a slippery slope that recalls the perverse effect denounced by Walzer under the heading of conversion.⁸⁸⁹

Now, I want to argue that by insisting in this manner in the fragile constitution of compromises, and also by alerting to the danger of turning fragile compromises on “compromising of principles” Ricœur is actually implicitly making a claim that has far reaching implications for his own philosophy. Without anticipating too much, I can say that Ricœur always sought mediations in his philosophy. To reiterate, he always said that these were “fragile and provisional mediations”⁸⁹⁰, and he was always afraid that these turn into “compromises” in the pejorative sense of the word, that is, false shortcuts which would betray the principles at stake in each of the theories he was mediating.⁸⁹¹

In this article, Ricœur concludes that this paradox of treating the state as whole and a part, a container and something contained brings with it the complexity of a multitude of generating centers of rights, as well as a paradox of sovereignty being divided between states and supranational entities. Ultimately, we can see this article as a critical appraisal of this pluralization. At the same time, Ricœur’s coupling of these two books allows us to better grasp the similarities between the notions of conflict to which we have dedicated this chapter.

With Walzer, what we have is a depiction of the conflict in the apportionment of social goods. The same could be said for Rawls. As for Rawls, for Boltanski and Thévenot societies can also be seen as consensual-conflictual phenomena, even if the sources of conflict and their respective solutions are different in each case. Rawls is more preoccupied with providing an ideal theory and an ordering of the principles of justice. When trying to deal with actually existing societies he proposes the solution of a minimalist overlapping consensus without however specifying how it would work and what exactly to include in it.

⁸⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

⁸⁹⁰ On the use of “fragile and provisional mediations” see Ricœur, *Amour et justice* (Paris: Seuil, 2008), p. 15.

⁸⁹¹ On this problem, see Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 76.

Boltanski and Thévenot plead for compromises in the orders of justification. Ultimately, both Rawls and Boltanski / Thévenot seek pacification. Walzer does not deal directly with this problem in the *Spheres of Justice*, but from all these authors, he is the one to put forward a thicker model of political organization and apportionment of social goods.

Therefore, we have seen in this chapter conflicts of norms, conflicts on the apportionment of social goods, conflicts in the way each normative principle (or polity, in the case of pragmatic sociology) might eventually invade into one another; the same problem was posed by Walzer concerning social goods. With Walzer we had the solution of a theory of justice based on limits and vigilance; with Boltanski and Thévenot we saw a plead for compromise, with Ricœur doubting that an overarching compromise might be reached, but arguing that fragile compromises and overlapping consensuses are very important.

Ultimately, from all these intersections with Ricœur's thought, the one with pragmatic sociology has been the more fertile, and more systematically developed. Alain Loute, for example, has explored pragmatic sociology from a Ricoeurian standpoint. In his thesis on the social creation of norms⁸⁹², he argued that the Ricoeurian philosophy of action allows us to really grasp normative creativity and to go beyond the mere reproduction of conventions. In my conclusion I will talk about "Ricoeurian philosophy after Ricœur", which entails a creative renewal of some of the leads spelled out by Ricœur. It goes without saying that pragmatic sociologists are one of the main movements undertaking such a renewal.

Before ending this chapter allow me to mention the critical analyzis of capitalism such as we can find it in *The New Spirit of Capitalism*. This book, written in the second half of the 1990s takes a pessimistic look at the state of critique, amid a profound mutation and even a reinforcement of capitalism. The book was translated into English in 2005 and has had a significant impact on all those still interested in understanding capitalism as a system of social integration and coordination of social practices. Writing in the late nineties, Boltanski and Chiapello found that the relation between capitalism and the exercise of critique was inverted if compared to what they had witnessed in the late 1960s and early

⁸⁹² See Alain Loute, *La création sociale des normes. De la socio-économie des conventions à la philosophie de l'action de Paul Ricœur* (Hildesheim: Georg Olms Verlag, 2008).

1970s.⁸⁹³ In that period, productivity and profitability were down, there was an increase in real wages and yet social critique was at its height, namely with the student protests of which May 1968 in France was the privileged example. In contrast, they claim, in spite of the fact that from the beginning of the 1980s onwards inequalities began to rise, capitalism was able to modify itself and to regain the trust of social actors to the point of ensuring their peaceful collaboration. In other words, even if capitalism was at its height in the 1990s and if the majority of workers did not have better living or working conditions if compared with the situation they had in the late 1960s and early 1970s, critique had been silenced.

And why? Because capitalism can be seen as a system of justification and persuasion, leading social actors to accept its conditions and peacefully collaborate with it. The pessimistic result, according to Boltanski and Chiapello, is “a sense of impotence” and a practical “closing down [of] the field of possibilities”.⁸⁹⁴ Now, it is not hard to see that these descriptions come very close to what in the philosophical tradition, from Marx onwards, is denounced as being ideological phenomena. Critique had allegedly been silenced, precisely because people had more or less bought the ideology. The closing down of the field of possibilities, on the other hand, is precisely what Ricœur wanted to counteract with his notion of utopia. Boltanski and Chiapello mention the possibility of utopia but at the time of their writing they only see utopias in the form of returns to an idealized past, and hence with little practical effect in the world. Critique was thus at a standstill at that time, they argue.

Summing up their analyzes in just a few sentences, I will say that they see capitalism as a system of perpetual mutation and which evolves by absorbing the critiques that are addressed to it. In that way, it is as resistant as it is pervasive. In a minimal definition, it is “*an imperative to unlimited accumulation of capital by formally peaceful means.*”⁸⁹⁵ Nevertheless, as they argue, the detachment of capital from material forms of wealth gives it an abstract character. That is, inbuilt in the definition of capitalism there is a tendency to develop an insatiable character. There is no reason why the individual capitalist should stop the process

⁸⁹³ Luc Boltanski and Ève Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p. xxxv.

⁸⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. xlv.

⁸⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

of accumulation at any given point. Evidently, in the long run, this can tend to produce inequalities. Inequalities can lead to dissatisfaction. But in order for the capitalist system to pursue its goals, some degree of social peace and collaboration from social actors is of course needed. As such, and by means of a reactualization of a concept originally taken from Max Weber⁸⁹⁶, Boltanski and Chiapello spell out what they call the “spirit of capitalism”, that is, the evolving body of beliefs, values and justifications that on every occasion capitalism puts forward in order to guarantee the collaboration of social actors. And why is this needed? Because, according to these authors,

In many respects, capitalism is an absurd system: in it, wage-earners have lost ownership of the fruits of their labour and the possibility of pursuing a working life free of subordination. As for capitalists, they find themselves yoked to an interminable, insatiable process, which is utterly abstract and dissociated from the satisfaction of consumption needs, even of a luxury kind. For two such protagonists, integration into the capitalist process is singularly lacking in justifications.⁸⁹⁷

However, and in spite of its latent irrationality in terms of social integration, the system demands the collaboration of a large number of people whose prospects of profit are low. And precisely the body of justifications, or ideologies, that are put forward, convinces these people. The conclusion is simple: besides its dimensions of coordination of social interaction, economic regulation and so forth, capitalism also is, or at least entails, a certain type of morality. It puts forward values, which in turn are embodied in practices that present themselves as the best possible practices, those that allow for no alternative course. Sometimes, these are even naturalized.

But since, from time to time, things go awry, and the system comes to be criticized, people mobilize themselves, social movements of protest are formed and the public image of things as they stand becomes negative, what does it do? It mutates, absorbing new characteristics that better suit what seems to be demanded

⁸⁹⁶ See Max Weber, *The Protestant Ethic and the Spirit of Capitalism*, translated by Talcott Parsons (New York: Dover Publications, 2003). Weber, of course, saw the “spirit” of capitalism and the development of capitalistic practices as an unintended consequence of the protestant ethic, whereas Boltanski and Thévenot use this term in a much more systematic manner, and they do not see its development as purely accidental.

⁸⁹⁷ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 7.

by precisely those critiques that targeted it. If we accept this diagnosis, then we must accept that in a paradoxical way, and as Boltanski and Chiapello argue, capitalism needs its critics. Without them, it would petrify and eventually, who knows, perish. But because the system itself is elastic, its survival and thriving have been made easier by the absorption of critiques and transformation of practices leading to the possibility of new justifications.

Following this thread, Boltanski and Chiapello thus propose a brief history of capitalism, following its different phases, the guiding ideals of each of them, the critiques that have been addressed to capitalism in each of these phases, and how capitalism evolved by incorporating them. These phases go from the ideal of the bourgeois self-made man, to the contemporary heroic figure of the manager, and the appearance of the *cadres*, a category to which pragmatic sociologists paid much attention. I will not follow all these developments. Suffice it to say that the latest metamorphosis of capitalism detected by Boltanski and Chiapello at the time they were writing the book was intrinsically connected with the managerial revolution. By analyzing a wide array of management literature, they spelled out a new normative polity, the “projective city”. In this new world order, they argue, managers embodied some of the ideals of the “artistic critique” that developed in the 1960s. Two types of critique, they argue, developed in the 19th century: the “artistic critique”, which strives for authenticity and liberation, and a social critique, aiming at denouncing poverty and exploitation.⁸⁹⁸ These types of critique evidently underwent evolution in the 20th century, but by the 1960s and 1970s capitalism was under fire by these two types of critiques, one stemming more from students, the other from workers, labor movements, and so on. Nevertheless, their claim is that the managerial revolution that started in the early 1980s was able to transform capitalism to such an extent that its dominant morality was able to absorb the artistic critiques while at the same time downplaying social critiques. At the time of big centralized corporations, people complained from lack of freedom, lack of control of their time, monotonous tasks, alienation and so forth. Now, with the emphasis being put on projects, multitasking, and capabilities connected with communication skills, the emphasis is more on networking than on hierarchy. Workers are supposed to be creative and

⁸⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

inventive, display enthusiasm and team spirit.⁸⁹⁹ These developments and changes in the structure of corporations and of the way work has radically transformed in the last decades, including the consequences of globalization and changes in bureaucracy have also been highlighted by Richard Sennett.⁹⁰⁰ Ultimately, if we follow the claim of Boltanski and Chiapello, it is as if the demands for liberation called for by the artistic critique were heard and partially satisfied. It is as if capitalism succeeded in fashioning its image as the best of possible worlds.

Boltanski and Chiapello, of course, do not think that there has been an utter elimination of alienation and work exploitation. But they do think the managerial revolution did a good job of making them less apparent. Consequently, their diagnosis is of a disarming of critique in recent decades. In their postscript, they plead for a sociology “*contra* fatalism”. They claim they hope having contributed to “revive critique”⁹⁰¹ and its liberating force, but do not know what the future holds. All in all, their diagnosis is pessimistic. They see the rise in individualism as leading to skeptical indifference, and the alternative of total commitment as being discredited and accused of dogmatism. In other words, they see their contemporary society as partially submerged in anomie.⁹⁰²

These sociological analyzes are not without consequences for our own proposal. On the one hand, the type of work put forward by Boltanski and Chiapello is already an implicit critique of capitalism, and can thus be meaningfully connected with the types of “critical theories” Boltanski mentions ten years later in *On Critique*. On the other hand, if we accept these conclusions as good, not only is the conflict about the apportionment of social goods and economic redistribution shown to be more evident (even if, as it were, *concealed* by the façade of peaceful integration of late capitalism) but the conditions of vigilance and prevention from conversion called for by Walzer are made more difficult and problematic. If capitalism generates inequality but if people tend to accept it and thus implicitly legitimate those who do succeed, the invasion of the market sphere into the other domains is facilitated. So the challenge is greater.

If we fast-forward fifteen years to the present time, the socio-economic

⁸⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

⁹⁰⁰ See Richard Sennett, *The Culture of the New Capitalism* (New Haven: Yale University Press, 2006).

⁹⁰¹ Boltanski and Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, p. 531.

⁹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 532.

landscape of the North Atlantic has once again changed. With the dawn of yet another crisis, inequalities have risen once again: real wages are lower, and the concentration of capital in a few hands is higher. However, since the abuses of the pre-crisis years have burst out in the open, so have social movements and a renewal and reinforcement of critique. What the results will be remains yet to be seen. On the one hand, there seems to be a greater level of civic vigilance. On the other hand, in the real decision making arenas, what we have seen up until now was a tightening of the financial stranglehold in ailing societies, especially in Europe's peripheries.

What this all entails is, in a way, a betrayal of our desire to live together under a meaningful horizon of cooperation, as Ricœur would have put it. Maybe what is called for is a new critique of reason. But I will only address this in part eight. As for now, I will move to the last stop of my overview of the contemporary reappraisal of conflict, namely, the one that resurfaces in the works of Charles Taylor. Over and over again, I have talked about substantive accounts, thick descriptions and an emphasis on the good, when speaking about Ricœur, and to distinguish him from the proceduralist standpoints. The time has now come to mention the author which, besides Ricœur, spelled out a more forceful account of a substantive ethical standpoint taking into account a meaningful notion of the good.

2.3 – Charles Taylor: Hypergoods and the Conflict in the Making of the Modern Identity

In the context of the late 20th century and early 21st century philosophy, Charles Taylor's work is perhaps the one whose main orientations most strongly resonate with those of Ricœur. Like Ricœur, Taylor insists on the pertinence of the category of personal identity, over against Hume's and Parfit's objections. He also influenced what is sometimes called the "narrative turn" in philosophy and the social sciences, alongside Alasdair MacIntyre and Ricœur. In fact, for them, not only are narratives important, they are also one of the main features through which we come to make sense of our lives. Taylor's enquiry into the modern identity is also depicted as an essay in "retrieval", that is, a reconstruction of sources, which is very similar to one of the versions of Ricœur's hermeneutics. Finally, as I already mentioned before, both Ricœur's and Taylor's ethical standpoints put an emphasis in the predicate "good" as being decisive for the orientation of our lives. This is to say that their framework is ultimately neo-Aristotelian, and placed in stark contrast with strictly deontological or procedural theories of morality or justice, such as Kant's, Habermas's and Rawls's. This latter point is even clearer in Taylor than it is in Ricœur, because Ricœur's own standpoint encompasses so many of the others. The two men knew each other and read each other and it is safe to assume that their respective philosophies exerted some reciprocal influence upon each other.

2.3.1 – Hypergoods, moral sources and inescapable frameworks

In *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity*⁹⁰³, which was published around a year before Ricœur's *Oneself as Another*, what is at stake is therefore what we can call "goods". However, these goods are here taken as more than an economic good (something like a commodity) or even a social good to be apportioned, as we have seen in the theories of justice of Rawls and Walzer. Like Walzer, Taylor can be considered a communitarian (even if he rejects the tag),

⁹⁰³ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self: The Making of the Modern Identity* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1989).

having decisively contributed to what came to be known as multiculturalism.⁹⁰⁴ As such, he understands the importance of social goods and also like Walzer, defends and upholds the plurality of such goods.

However, Taylor puts forward a category that none of the above authors speaks about: that of the “hypergoods”. These also entail more than what Boltanski and Thévenot call *polities*, insofar as these are taken as being strictly social in character. However, there is a certain similarity between Taylor’s hypergoods and the generalizing principle of *polities*, insofar as what is at stake is a principle of hierarchization. In fact, Taylor defines hypergoods as “goods which not only are incomparably more important than others but provide the standpoint from which these must be weighed, judged, decided about”.⁹⁰⁵ The great difference here is that in *polities* what is always at stake is the “common good”, that is, the hierarchization always entails the creation of a social order; Taylor’s hypergoods, however, can be strictly personal (in that I might value one good above any others and come to decide my life because of that) even if this hypergood might come to count in my life only through my insertion in intersubjective communities of value. But this hypergood is seen by Taylor as having, if I may use this formulation, an existential gravitas that is not easily ignored (as opposed to the strategies of detachment from certain worlds of which Boltanski and Thévenot spoke about). If something is *my* hypergood, there is no ignoring it. If I am, for instance, an artist or a poet and adopt an expressivist stance, the meaning of artistic creation assumes for me a decisive character.

The peculiarity of Taylor’s approach is that he decides to undertake an historical analysis of the way in which the goods that can be considered as “hypergoods” came about and imposed themselves; this is, for him, a striking feature of the modern identity. Through the identification with certain hypergoods, this identity becomes the product of a peculiar evolution. But what is more interesting for our own problematic is that the identification of hypergoods, Taylor argues, is also a source of conflict:

⁹⁰⁴ See Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of recognition*, *op. cit.*, and also his more recent article “Interculturalism or Multiculturalism” in *Philosophy and Social Criticism* vol. 38, nr. 4-5: 413-423, where Taylor comes back to offer some precisions on the notion of multiculturalism and its differences with the (more European) model of Interculturalism.

⁹⁰⁵ Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 63.

Hypergoods are generally a source of conflict. The most important ones, those which are most widely adhered to in our civilization, have arisen through a historical supersession of earlier, less adequate views. (...) Hypergoods are understood by those who espouse them as a step to a higher moral consciousness.⁹⁰⁶

Why is this taken to be a higher moral consciousness? The first thing to understand is that for Taylor, even though the origin of what we can call “goods” or “hypergoods” might be “social” and “historical” (in that they might arise from unarticulated ideas that were spread in certain communities and are transmitted by a historical process) but its main significance in our lives is “moral” (or what Ricœur would call “ethical”). Our position towards the good determines our orientation in “moral space”, which is the topic of Taylor’s second chapter.⁹⁰⁷ By spelling out his claim in these terms, Taylor is renewing with the ancient notion of moral orientation as a kind of “cybernetics” which, in Plato, is tied up with the art of self-governance, understood through the metaphor of steersmanship. We navigate our way through life, and this orientation is, in a way, a direction towards (what we consider as being) the good, with all its resonances of the Socratic depiction of the life that is worth living.

In fact, for Taylor, the “good” or “the goods” determine what he calls “inescapable frameworks”⁹⁰⁸ and this is the reason why, right at the outset, he asserts that selfhood and the good (as well as morality) are inextricably intertwined.⁹⁰⁹ The framework can be seen as being the product of a discovery, in the sense of an order that pre-exists us and resonates in us – either we take this order in a naturalistic or in a theistic sense – or of an invention, as we can see in most of the expressivist notions of identity that have sprouted from the Romantic period onwards.

Each hypergood thus involves the possibility of creating a framework. And if we can indeed “create” hypergoods, this must be akin, as Taylor himself admits, to a “transvaluation of values” in the Nietzschean sense.⁹¹⁰ What used to be considered “good” ceases to be so, and what turns out to be good in the new

⁹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

⁹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, “The Self in Moral Space”, pp. 25-52.

⁹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, chapter one, pp. 3-24.

⁹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

⁹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

“order” is either the contrary, or else something simply different, from what was considered good in the “old” order.

Taylor goes so far as to explicitly claim that living without such frameworks is impossible, because it is impossible to live without strong qualitative discriminations.⁹¹¹ It is not true that in our lives “anything goes”. In stating this, he seems to be once again returning to Plato’s metaphor of the navigation to which I alluded above:

The claim is that living within such strongly qualified horizons is constitutive of human agency, that stepping outside these limits would be tantamount to stepping outside what we would recognize as integral, that is, undamaged human personhood.

(...)

People may see their identity as defined partly by some moral or spiritual commitment, says as a Catholic, or an anarchist. Or they may define it in part by the nation or tradition they belong to, as an Armenian, say, or a Québécois. What they are saying by this is not just that they are strongly attached to this spiritual view or background; rather, it is that this provides the frame within which they can determine where they stand on questions of what is good, or worthwhile, or admirable, or of value. Put counterfactually, they are saying that were they to lose this commitment or identification, they would be at sea, as it were; they wouldn’t know anymore, for an important range of questions, what the significance of things was for them.⁹¹²

Thus, to be able to answer for oneself is to know where one stands, what one wants to answer.⁹¹³ Ultimately, Taylor asserts that this phenomenological account of identity states the “transcendental conditions” of what is conceivable in human life, it explores its limits.⁹¹⁴ Thus a totally detached, carefree individual who would not put forward any values or let him or herself be guided by these values, is beyond (or below) what we consider to be human. This is a view shared by many, including Bernard Williams and his famous description of the “amoralist”.⁹¹⁵

⁹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 27.

⁹¹² *Ibid.*

⁹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

⁹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

⁹¹⁵ See Bernard Williams, *Morality: An Introduction to Ethics* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1993), chapter one, “The amoralist”, pp. 3-13.

What Taylor aims is at providing *thick* descriptions of our moral lives; he admits explicitly “to move to a language of “thick description”, in the sense of this term that Clifford Geertz has made famous, that is, a language which is “a lot richer and culturally bound, because it articulates the significance and point that the actions of feelings have within a certain culture.”⁹¹⁶ But let us note in passing that this is *not* the mainstream method of social or moral theory. Taylor’s efforts therefore are put forth in a somewhat polemical manner, because he is basically struggling against the overwhelmingly dominant strand of reductionist and/or naturalist and/or proceduralist depictions of the world order in general and of moral life in particular. Over against Taylor’s thick descriptions, mainstream proceduralist theories actually sometimes appear as unbearably *thin*.

What I want to focus on is the way in which Taylor describes hypergoods as being inherently conflictual:

An ethical outlook organized around a hypergood in this way is thus inherently conflictual and in tension. The highest good is not only ranked above the other recognized goods of the society; it can in some cases challenge and reject them, as the principle of equal respect has been doing to the goods and virtues connected with traditional family life, as Judaism and Christianity did to the cults of pagan religions, and as the author of the *Republic* did to the goods and virtues of agonistic citizen life.⁹¹⁷

This depiction brings us back to the transvaluation of values that takes place whenever a new hypergood imposes itself; as Taylor admits, following Nietzsche, “a transvaluation is not necessarily a once-for-all affair. The older condemned goods remain; they resist; some seem ineradicable from the human heart. So that the struggle and tension continues.”⁹¹⁸

This last depiction is very important. It contains, in a nutshell, the justification for a state of affairs where a plurality of different values coexist at the same time. Indeed, and if we want to borrow the terms from linguistic analysis, even if the different values – and their eventual rise to the status of hypergoods around which meaningful frameworks are formed – have different origins in time and can be assessed through genealogy or diachronic analysis, the fact is that

⁹¹⁶ Charles Taylor, *Sources of the Self*, p. 80.

⁹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

⁹¹⁸ *Ibid.*

many of them can coexist synchronically. And they do coexist, sometimes in different places in the world, other times in the same places but shared by different people and even, one might argue, in the same people, who are sometimes divided by their respective loyalty to different values and orient their action according to different goods, whether or not they are aware of it. Because the “old” values are seldom or even not at all eliminated, because they tend to resist, the possibility of conflict is inescapable.

This evidently poses a threat, one that must be considered in all its seriousness; the threat of skepticism:

And this actual struggle and disagreement, the seemingly ineradicable absence of unanimity about these hypergoods, has always been a potent source of moral skepticism.⁹¹⁹

Why the threat of skepticism is posed is rather self-evident. If there are no hypergoods that impose themselves in light of their own objectivity, their own force of appeal, how do we avoid falling back into full-blown relativism? Taylor himself concedes that what is properly transcendental is the necessity to let ourselves be guided by a hypergood, but not what that hypergood is itself. So the need to be guided still does not help us in “choosing”, so to speak, the hypergood through which we should orient ourselves (assuming that this is a matter of choice, and not of overwhelming imposition, conversion, which might sometimes be the case).

In my view, only a different epistemological standpoint, one that makes fully explicit the inescapability of the conflict of interpretations in the Ricoeurian sense, is able to radically ground value pluralism, without falling back upon full-blown relativism or skepticism. But this discussion will only take place in part four below.

As I hinted at above, Taylor’s work in *Sources of the Self* is largely an effort of retrieval, that is, in his own words, of “articulating what has remained implicit”⁹²⁰, of spelling out what he calls the “moral sources” from which the orientation towards the hypergoods stems. In a way, this puts the social theorist in

⁹¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

⁹²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 103.

a position of having to “invent” language, not because it is not available, but because a new term might bring to light some aspects of experience that have not been fully disclosed before. He remains faithful to his method, when he states that “the path to articulacy has to be a historical one.”⁹²¹

But how exactly do these conflicts between hypergoods unfold? Taylor gives some examples that are tied up with the way in which the particular history of the West developed.

A cluster of these turn in modern culture on the tension or even conflict between our commitment to certain hypergoods, in particular the demands of universal and equal respect and of modern self-determining freedom, on one hand, and our sense of the value of what must apparently be sacrificed in their name, on the other. There are a number of different conflicts of this kind. In some cases, what seems threatened is the good of community; in others friendship, or else our traditional identity, seems in danger. In still other situations of conflict, the goods of sensuality and sexual fulfillment are in tension with our higher goals.⁹²²

Thus conflict seems exacerbated because sometimes we are forced to *choose*. And in choosing we must sacrifice, somehow or another, other goods that also count as valuable for us. This is what Ricœur will call, in the little ethics of *Oneself as Another*, the choice between the bad and the worse.

Sometimes, Taylor is radical enough to affirm that we cannot help being on both sides of the problem: we need to espouse hypergoods and *still* we feel compelled to defend the goods that are sacrificed in their name.⁹²³ In these passages, he comes close to what we can call an existential conflict, implicitly admitting a philosophical anthropology akin to the one Ricœur sketches in *Fallible Man*.

However, he too seems to hesitate between this diagnostic of inevitable conflict and the possibility of reconciliation. In a very significant manner, he places articulacy of our moral sources as the possible path to reconciliation:

⁹²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 104.

⁹²² *Ibid.*, p. 101.

⁹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 105.

The moral conflicts of modern culture rage within each of us. Unless, that is, our greater lucidity can help us to see our way to a reconciliation. If I may give expression to an even farther-out hunch, I will say that I see this as the potential goal and fruit of articulacy.⁹²⁴

But he also admits that this is a risky bet, because “if reconciliation is impossible, then articulacy will buy us much greater inner conflict.”⁹²⁵ Why this must be so is easy to understand. If we follow Taylor’s argument, we see that according to him many of the values and goods with which we identify ourselves operate in us in a way that is not fully transparent. We are not 100% clear about our motivations and reasons for action, even though we need to be situated within the inescapable frameworks. This is the reason why we sometimes act in contradictory ways. He also thinks that the predominant conception of disengaged reason, self-sufficient humanism and naturalism, which are major developments of the modern era, fail to grasp something of our moral predicament and the way in which we live our lives, because they are too “thin” and have blind spots that they cannot solve by themselves. Thus he thinks that espousing these conceptions entails a kind of reductionism that ultimately mutilates important and integral parts of our moral life. Part of his effort of articulacy will therefore aim at self-understanding; it is a sort of “hermeneutics of the self” in the sense Ricœur will give to it, and that will be dealt with in parts four and five of this dissertation. An hermeneutics not only of individual selves, but also of the publicly available moral sources that have come about in the historical process and that happen to be available to us, in our time. The move is therefore from a macro to a micro level: by understanding what sources and hypergoods are available to us, we understand how our moral life works and why we act the way we do. But if this hermeneutics, this articulacy, discovers that we cannot but live in a conflicted way, the price to pay is an exacerbation of conflict (let us say that we will have less excuses for distraction or dismissal of this fact); nonetheless, to reiterate, his hope is that a better articulacy, a fully developed hermeneutics, will bring about reconciliation.

In this, as is easy to see, Taylor is obviously post-Hegelian, he who contributed so much to Hegel studies in the 20th century. However, this is clearly just a wager, a hope, which brings him once again very close to Ricœur’s own

⁹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 106.

⁹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

standpoint. The rest of the book, the details of which can not be dealt with here, delve into the different moral sources of what can be considered good, be it inwardness (part two), ordinary life (part three), nature (part four), up until Modernism and Post-modernism itself (part five).

2.3.2 – The conflicts of modernity, our conflicts

Nonetheless, his conclusion⁹²⁶ is interesting, because after embarking in the long historical genealogy of all these sources, he undertakes a more synchronic analysis of these in our day and age, and concludes that the conflicts of modernity are still, in a way, our own conflicts. In explaining his method, he uses an excellent metaphor, that of the strata of a rock: “understanding our society requires that we take a cut through time – as one takes a cut through rock to find that some strata are older than others. Views coexist with those which have arisen later in reaction to them. This is to oversimplify, of course, because these rival outlooks go on influencing and shaping each other.”⁹²⁷

In the conclusion, he distributes the three main moral sources exerting influence in our own self-understanding and moral orientation in a schematic map. According to him, these moral sources are: a) the original theistic grounding; b) the naturalism of disengaged reason which in our day takes scientific forms; c) the multiple forms of expressivism, either those stemming from the Romantic period, or its Modernist successors.⁹²⁸ He also acknowledges the influence of d) “Post-Modern” strands of thought, but these too are criticized.

Taylor realizes that many types of conflict, some of which we could call *conflicts of interpretation*, can take place between these multiple influences. The last pages of the book are dedicated to unpacking what he ultimately takes to be the three main types of conflict taking place nowadays: 1) conflicts about sources; 2) the issue of instrumentalism; and 3) the issue about morality itself (which largely stems from the attacks of Post-Modern thinkers).

He chooses to start by tackling issue 2, the one concerning the disengaged, instrumental mode of life, because he takes it to be the *dominant*

⁹²⁶ *Ibid.*, chapter 25, “The conflicts of Modernity”, pp. 495-521.

⁹²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 497.

⁹²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 495.

standpoint in our epoch, and this since the Enlightenment: Locke, Hume and what he calls the “punctual self”.⁹²⁹ Following this line of reasoning, he claims that the society that has imposed itself since the 18th century has been dominated by “a utilitarian value outlook entrenched in the institutions of a commercial, capitalist, and finally a bureaucratic mode of existence [that] tends to empty life of its richness, depth or meaning.”⁹³⁰ This claim seems to me to be entirely fair, and Taylor recalls the several critiques addressed to this society by Tocqueville (there is no more room for heroism or aristocratic virtues), Kierkegaard (loss of passion), Nietzsche (his depiction of the “last men” and their “pitiable comfort”) and Marx (critique of capitalism) / Weber (the “iron cage” of bureaucracy).⁹³¹

Moreover, he mentions the expressivist critiques, those that insist that the dominant view on human reason as being instrumental and the organization of society it entails structurally impede expressive fulfillment. However, he also sees dangers in the narrowly subjectivist stance. Indeed, this latter standpoint runs the risk of shallowness: “A total and fully consistent subjectivism would tend towards emptiness: nothing would count as a fulfillment in a world in which literally nothing was important but self-fulfillment.”⁹³² However, part of the problem, as he sees it, is that the only alternative to subjectivism that contemporaneity has come up with is precisely a thin theory of procedural fairness that falls back into the instrumentalist outlook.⁹³³ But what these leave out, according to Taylor, is the possibility of finding moral sources that originate outside the subject and nonetheless resonate *within* him or herself; as he puts it, the possibility of “the grasping of an order which is inseparably indexed to a personal vision”.⁹³⁴

As is easy to see, Taylor takes a critical stance towards the instrumental way of conceiving reason and the self, as well as towards the way of organizing society that these visions tend to promote. His two main charges, however, are those of 1) what he persistently calls atomism (the individual is taken out of community life and enters into a series of partial roles designed for highly specific ends) and its inherent selfish individualism and 2) the lack of space for a credible “thick” theory of our moral predicament, one which promotes the recognition of

⁹²⁹ *Ibid.*, chapter 9, “Locke’s punctual self”, pp. 159-176.

⁹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 500.

⁹³¹ *Ibid.*

⁹³² *Ibid.*, p. 507.

⁹³³ *Ibid.*, p. 508.

⁹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 510.

goods that affect us from “the outside”. Taylor sees these overindividualistic societies as also posing other kinds of threats, even to the environment: individualism, taken to its extreme, can lead to ecological irresponsibility.

To be sure, Taylor has nothing against self-governance; but he thinks the way it has been described is misguided. He draws on Tocqueville to assert that self-governing individuals need a sense of identification with their public institutions and political way of life.⁹³⁵

Ultimately, what he wants to develop is an “exploration of order through personal resonance”.⁹³⁶ According to him, we have not been paying attention to these phenomena in our culture, at least not as much as we should. In passing, he drops an excellent metaphor about the relations between artists, thinkers and philosophers, and the way he envisages the connection with these meaningful outside sources. It is worth quoting a longer passage, because this seems to be the place where Taylor is more straightforward about his own option and views:

This is a major gap. It is not just the epiphanic art of the last two centuries which fails to get its due by this dismissal. We are now in an age in which a publicly accessible cosmic order of meaning is an impossibility. The only way we can explore the order in which we are set with an aim to defining moral sources is through this part of personal resonance. This is true not only of epiphanic art but of other efforts, in philosophy, in criticism, which attempt the same search. This work, though it obviously fails of any epiphanic quality, falls into the same category. I have throughout sought language to clarify the issues, and I have found this in images of profound personal resonance like ‘epiphany’, ‘moral sources’, ‘disengagement’, ‘empowering’, and others. These are the images which enable me to see more clearly than I did before. They could, I believe, be the animating ideas of an epiphanic work, but that would require another kind of capacity. The great epiphanic work actually can put in contact with the sources it taps. It can *realize* the contact. The philosopher or critic tinkers around and shapes images through which he or another *might* one day do so. The artist is like the race car driver, and we are the mechanics in the pit; except that in this case, the mechanics usually have four thumbs, and they have only a lazy grasp of the wiring, much less than the drivers have. The point of this analogy is that we delude ourselves if we think that philosophical or critical language for these matters is somehow more hard-edged and more free from personal index than

⁹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

⁹³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 511.

that of poets or novelists. The subject doesn't permit language which escapes personal resonance.⁹³⁷

This very long and engaging quotation has a lot to unpack. Taylor admits that were he capable of achieving it, he would have granted his book an "epiphanic quality". We see him simultaneously avowing the shortcomings of philosophical language and method, and admitting that there is nothing else he could do. He also thinks that a work like his book could hopefully arouse an epiphanic work. The assumption here is that articulacy, clarification, by bringing about greater clarity in self-knowledge and in the knowledge of our culture would or could result in an experience of a sort of conversion. Because we are supposed to see the importance of this kind of moral sources, we are free to engage in a search for them and hopefully, if we are the artists or novelists with the capacity to produce epiphanies, this self-clarification will motivate us to do so. But perhaps the most important part is the ontological claim that hides beneath the colorful analogy of the four thumbed philosophers, versus the stunning race-car artists. The claim is that the language that artists and novelists can put forward can realize the contact with the source; in other words, that there is some sort of ontological power of poetry, art, and so on. Taylor does not say that poetic language or art *create* this reality, but he does imply that they make us, in a way, *discover it*. And this in fact comes very close to what Ricœur calls *ontological vehemence*, and that he develops, in connection with his studies on metaphor in the 1970s.

Having said this, Taylor's own position in this conflict is well defined. Ultimately, he does not restrict himself to a diagnosis of conflicts; rather, he also takes place within them, much like Marx, or the Critical Theorists had done before him. For proponents of disengaged reason, there are no sources of this sort. For him, there are. According to him, one of the side effects of the assumption of the existence of these sources is coming to live in a "deeply resonant human environment and, even more, to have affiliations with some depth in time and commitment."⁹³⁸ So, in a way, this is a kind of attitude he is proposing. One of care towards the world and others, of attention, of "respect for what is there". Ultimately, he aims at the good of family, polis and ecology. These concerns are,

⁹³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 512.

⁹³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 513.

he thinks, integral parts of our moral predicament. This is his position concerning point 2 above (instrumentalism).

But it also discloses his position concerning points 1 (conflicts on sources) and 3 (the existence of morality itself). For him, “high standards need strong sources.”⁹³⁹ If we strive for benevolence and justice, like many utilitarians tended to do, we need, according to Taylor, something like *agape*, where doing good basically entails an appreciation of the intrinsic goodness of the creature. If not, according to him, we risk falling back in Dostoyevsky’s or Nietzsche’s critiques of the acts of beneficence as mere expressions of guilt that risk turning into contempt, or even hatred, because they can demand an unbearable cost in self love and self-fulfillment.⁹⁴⁰ So we can see what type of sources Taylor chooses: those that are substantive, ontological, and that demand thick descriptions. In a word, *strong sources*. But this in fact entails his belief, which almost goes without saying, in morality itself. In a way, he has to address this issue, because of the attack on this notion brought about by Postmodernism.

The charge that high ideals might be interwoven with domination and exclusion is well known. In fact, the accusation that moral conscience itself might be an expression of false conscience, and hence an illusion, is as old as Nietzsche. This is one of the claims spelled out by the “masters of suspicion” with which Ricœur grapples in the 1960s, and which will be further analyzed in chapter 4.1 below. Taylor does not deny that at some points, hypergoods might constitute crushing burdens on us. But he does deny that a good must be invalidated just because it might hypothetically and in some situations lead to suffering or destruction.⁹⁴¹ This is, in fact, some sort of logical fallacy because it consists in a form of argument from consequences and, what is more, from consequences that are only alleged. There is not even a prudential argument that could be used here: should we stop striving for justice, or arguing for benevolence, because in some cases this “instinct” might turn against itself and lead to violence?

Ultimately, Charles Taylor wants us to recognize the existence and pertinence of these strong sources and substantive hypergoods. His choice is clear. But part of his preliminary task is to make clear that these goods exist, and that

⁹³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 516.

⁹⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 517-518.

⁹⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 519.

given the conflict between them within us and in society at large, we have to choose, or to conciliate them as best as we can. What he wants to avoid is the “mutilation” that denies their own existence and viability as moral sources and hypergoods. And he actually sees this task as being inscribed in the good tradition of Critical Theory – albeit in a very peculiar way, we must say – because he claims this is a task of liberation:

Does something have to be denied? Do we have to choose between various kinds of spiritual lobotomy and self-inflicted wounds? Perhaps. Certainly most of the outlooks which promise us that we will be spared these choices are based on selective blindness. This is perhaps the major point elaborated in this book.

But I didn’t undertake it in this downbeat a spirit. The kind of study I have embarked on here can be a work, we might say, of liberation. The intuition which inspired it, which I have recurred to, is simply that we tend in our culture to stifle the spirit. (...)

We have read so many goods out of our official story, we have buried their power so deep beneath layers of philosophical rationale, that they are in danger of stifling. Or rather, since they are our goods, human goods, *we* are stifling.

The intention of this work was one of retrieval, an attempt to uncover buried goods through rearticulation – and thereby to make these sources again empower, to bring the air back into the half-collapsed lungs of the spirit.⁹⁴²

This is as powerful a passage as we can find in contemporary philosophy, and we cannot deny its broad appeal. We could even say, half seriously, that Hegel breathes again. Taylor recognizes the danger involved in this proposal, precisely insofar as the highest spiritual aspiration might lead to mutilation or destruction. But he does assert “the dilemma of mutilation” is “our greatest spiritual challenge, not an iron fate.”⁹⁴³ And so the final words of *Sources of the Self*, this masterpiece, are words of hope. Hope, in his case, of “a divine affirmation of the human” and also, to be clear, that a retrieval of these hypergoods does not lead to hatred and destruction, that we can overcome mutilation and bring out the good.

In a way, this a very untraditional academic book, and Taylor himself acknowledges that much of what he says might be accused of inconsistency and that some of his claims are unsupported, which is, we could say, tantamount to

⁹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 520.

⁹⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 521.

assuming that they are born out of a *wager*. Ultimately, these turn out to be the propositions of a believer, and the fact that Taylor assumes them as such only testifies to his bold *Redlichkeit*. In fact, what his later work does is to explore the meaning of secularism in our culture; namely, in the specific sense “secularism” assumes in his work, “a move from a society where belief in God is unchallenged and indeed, unproblematic, to one in which it is understood to be one option among others, and frequently not the easiest to embrace.”⁹⁴⁴ In this later work, Taylor willfully adopts the language of “fullness” (something like what we feel when we are in direct contact with the source) and “tacit framework” (i.e., the context provided for all beliefs in a certain age, which makes some options more “credible” than others, and which provides the assumptions for all ulterior questioning). Part of his investigation thus concerns the question of why this fullness comes to be, in the West, considered almost exclusively in immanent terms, and why this framework has come about (in stark contrast with the framework in which virtually all of our ancestors were, up until the dawn of Modernity). In his own words, “a secular age is one in which the eclipse of all goals beyond human flourishing becomes conceivable”.⁹⁴⁵ Thus his polemic is, in this book, even more sharply than in the preceding one, against self-sufficient humanism. We have lost naïveté, our framework is plural, but it seems to favor self-sufficient humanism, and against this, Taylor wants to reaffirm the possibility of the transcendent sources. I will not delve into the details of this recent work, because it extrapolates the subject of this part of the thesis, on the contemporary reappraisal of conflict. But his insights into the way our modern identity has unfolded and is now in inner turmoil are invaluable. In a word, his diagnosis of some of the conflicts affecting us, and of their respective historical sources, is illuminating, whether or not we share his particular option and position in the conflict. I will try to spell out this claim more clearly.

I think we could say that Taylor’s treatment of the conflict concerning hypergoods and the conflicts in the making of the modern identity have both a theoretical and a practical import. They have a theoretical relevance in that, by forcing us to acknowledge conflict in our modern predicament, and in moral sources (including those that “resonate” in us from without) they broaden our

⁹⁴⁴ Charles Taylor, *A Secular Age* (Harvard: Harvard University Press, 2007), p. 3.

⁹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

perspective over the whole moral phenomenon. They force us to see things that we could not acknowledge before, and to recognize that they exist or, at the very least, that it is *possible*, *conceivable* that they do. Because this is our moral life we are talking about, the practical import consists in allowing us to grasp alternative courses of action (or the same courses of action we took before, but with a different grounding). Because of this, I think that what he is doing comes very close to Ricœur's own use of conflict, but this will only be discussed in the three parts of this dissertation to follow.

The question that must be asked though is whether or not these strong moral sources, and Taylor's own choices, are only at the disposal of believers. That is, assuming that we recognize the conceivability of these sources, do we need to make the same wager as he does in order to act upon it? Do we need to believe in the goodness of all there is (people, the world) or even in God, to live up to our own moral ideals? The risk of answering yes to this question is that of excluding a whole bunch of people who are not, for a reason or another, willing to make that wager.

Perhaps the issue is addressed in a more potentially inclusive manner if we accept, as does Arto Laitinen⁹⁴⁶, strong, thick evaluations and descriptions, but envisage the possibility of making such evaluations without necessarily recurring to moral sources in the strong sense; without, as it were, having the need of something which imposes itself from without and resonates in us.

2.3.3 – The fundamental and the historical (Ricœur's reading of *Sources of the Self*)

Ricœur, as always, plays a part in this debate, in the context of the "legal turn" in his late philosophy. We have already seen his analyzes of Rawls, Walzer and Boltanski / Thévenot in *The Just*. In the second book dedicated to the topic of justice, *Reflections on the Just (Le Juste II)*, which is somewhat less systematic than the first one, consisting in three different parts – "studies", "readings" and

⁹⁴⁶ See Arto Laitinen, *Strong Evaluation Without Sources. On Charles Taylor's Philosophical Anthropology and Cultural Moral Realism* (doctoral dissertation presented at the University of Jyväskylä, 2003) especially chapter 10 "Does moral reality need sources?" (pp. 257-287), where Laitinen argues that Taylor's constitutive goods are "metaphysical-theological" and that we can do without such a perspective in our moral predicament.

“exercises” – *Sources of the Self* is given much attention. Ricœur dedicates two pieces to one of the problems raised by Taylor’s book, a “reading” (something very close to a critical book review) and an “exercise”, that is, an autonomous approach of a problem, from the standpoint of the conditions of application of the moral judgment in situation stemming from his little ethics. This last article deals with much more than the “reading”, and in fact does not discuss Taylor in a thematic way as the first does, but their closeness is disclosed in the very title they each have: the reading is called “The Fundamental and the Historical”⁹⁴⁷, while the study bears the title “The Universal and the Historical”.⁹⁴⁸ Fundamental and historical are not, of course, interchangeable concepts, but they both seem to assume, in the way Ricœur uses them, a Kantian, transcendental tone.

In the first of these two pieces Ricœur identifies what he takes to be the fundamental difficulty of the book: an “epistemological hiatus” between the first part of *Sources of the Self*, namely the transcendental character of the inescapable frameworks and the apparently historical contingent way in which moral ipseity turned out to be formed in the process of Modernity. Ricœur asks if we can speak, concerning inescapable frameworks and strong evaluations, of a “concrete universal” (in the Hegelian sense) that can be dealt with in an ahistorical or transhistorical way.⁹⁴⁹

Ricœur seems to accept the fertility of the metaphor of “moral space” and our orientation within it; he further suggests that this is not to be mistaken with Euclidean geometrical space. In fact, he argues that in the same way *idem temporality* and *ipse temporality* are different – in that ipse temporality avoids reification – so does our orientation within this moral space, because it is dynamic. Wandering, departure (Abraham) or the return home (Ulysses) thus assume a properly moral significance.⁹⁵⁰ *Who* I am and *where* I stand in the moral space do become correlative questions, as Taylor suggests.

But what Ricœur sees as problematic is precisely the mixture between a synchronic and a diachronic approach that we have alluded to above. He argues that in the historical parts of the book, Taylor uses a mixed strategy of

⁹⁴⁷ Paul Ricœur, “The Fundamental and the Historical: Notes on Charles Taylor’s *Sources of the Self*” in *Reflections on the Just*, trans. David Pellauer (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 2007), pp. 168-184.

⁹⁴⁸ Paul Ricœur, “The Universal and the Historical” in *Reflections on the Just*, pp. 232-248.

⁹⁴⁹ Ricœur, *The Fundamental and the Historical*, p. 169.

⁹⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

retrospection and anticipation. Ultimately, the difficulty is precisely one of combining the historical character of moral conceptions and the transhistorical character of ethical universals.⁹⁵¹ Ricœur goes so far as to see in this dialectic a new application for his distinction between sameness and ipseity. In fact, in our moral orientation, we can renew with, so to speak, “old” moral sources but when we do, we are always interpreting them anew; this is an application of what he calls the dialectic between sedimentation and innovation, which we will see in part four.

In the moral order, the past leaves not only inert traces, or residues, but also dormant energies, unexplored sources which we might assimilate to something like unkept promises, those which ground memory, as Paul Valéry put it, in speaking about the future of the past. This dormant character of as-yet-unfolded potentialities is what allows for resumptions, rebirths, reawakenings, through which the new gets connected with the old.⁹⁵²

Ricœur ultimately concludes that conflict is a constitutive part of the fundamental, that is, of inescapable frameworks themselves.⁹⁵³ He argues that these “transcendental” structures are not ahistorical, but transhistorical, which means that even though they are inescapable, they admit change in their core. But for this very reason, they cannot escape conflict:

Strong evaluations claim to be shared; therefore, they require a communicability in principle. But, for this very reason, they are also contestable. Their discrimination, which we saw was inevitable, opens the way to controversy. To put this, rather than that, “higher up” requires giving reasons. The question “How ought we to live” opens a field of conflict as soon as our choices call for justification.⁹⁵⁴

As we can see, Ricœur here proposes a reading of the conflict of the hypergoods somewhat inspired by a Habermasian ethics of discussion, and the problem of justification posed by Boltanski and Thévenot. By claiming that adhesion to moral sources, and to hypergoods, is not just the matter of a personal choice that could

⁹⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

⁹⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 181-182.

⁹⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 183.

⁹⁵⁴ *Ibid.*

be taken, as it were, in a purely detached fashion from the opinions of others, by emphasizing its public character and the need to justify this particular ranking and not other, he is not only emphasizing that placing a hierarchy in what are plural and incommensurable goods poses a problem and calls for a justification. He is also tying, in an even deeper manner than Taylor's, inescapable frameworks to conflictuality. It seems as if, for Ricœur, even though we are somewhat forced to choose our own way in life, thereby implicitly or explicitly assuming that for us one good or another is superior to all others, we cannot simply just make that choice and carry on living our life in peace and quiet. Rather, we are called upon to provide reasons (*logon didonai*) for that choice. On this account, living life ethically, without Socratic examination (not only self-examination, but even public debate) seems inescapable, as does the possibility – or even more, the likelihood – that our choice will be attacked and faced with the many other alternatives ways of life. In a nutshell: these crossed diagnoses, Taylor's and Ricœur's, almost force us to admit that plurality – of goods, moral sources, and so on – which for us, with our democratic temper, itself assumes the value of an invaluable good, involves at the same time a high price: the loss of unity, certainty and the constant need to fend for ourselves in a somewhat complicated world.

“The Universal and the Historical”, the concluding chapter of *Reflections on the Just*, is a very dense article that in a way sums up some of the problems discussed in this part of my thesis (at least those directly discussed by Ricœur, comprising mainly the theories of Rawls, Habermas, Walzer, Taylor, and Boltanski / Thévenot). In the introduction to this book, Ricœur assumes that the dialectic between the universal and the historical is something that interests him very much, and that this is the reason why he decided to analyze this tension in *Sources of the Self*. However, in this last chapter, what he undertakes is to reaffirm once again the basic structure of his little ethics – basic ethic, moral obligation, practical wisdom and the regional ethics – while, on the other hand, arbitrating once again between the universalistic Kantian character of the theories of Habermas, Apel, and Rawls, and the contextual claims of Walzer and Taylor, while at the same time placing the context of application under the banner of conflict, the tragic of action. Ricœur formulates this problematic in the following manner:

What is at stake in all these arguments is whether we can formulate on the ethical, juridical, political, and social planes universal principles that are valid independently of persons, communities, and cultures which are able to apply them, without any limitation having to do with the particular circumstances of their application, especially in light of the novel cases that have appeared in the modern era.⁹⁵⁵

Ricœur argues that there are indeed limitations imposed by the particular circumstances of the application of moral rules; but his first step is to approximate Rawls's and Habermas's approaches to the universal rule. He contends that the choice of the principles of justice taking place in the original position postulated by Rawls presupposes a process that can be assimilated to the ethics of discussion. He also thinks that such an ethics of discussion will always have conflicts in the apportionment and distribution of goods as one of its main topics, because both Rawls and Habermas accept pluralism as a fact; one of the virtues of both these approaches, according to Ricœur, is the transfer of conflictuality to the domain of language. It is through rational discussion that violence is avoided.⁹⁵⁶

However, one of Ricœur's contentions with Habermas is that discussion in itself does not deplete ethics; he calls our attention to the existence of "hard cases" which bring to the fore the problem of the application of the allegedly universal rule to particular situations, much more than the strict problem of the justification of the principle. And this is why we need to return to cultural and historical traditions: in order to mediate the process of application, this being one of the communitarian's objections to Rawls.⁹⁵⁷

The conclusion is that we need both: the normative background *and* the knowledge of historical tradition and of the plurality and heterogeneity of goods. This also presupposes, in a way, that respect is due to persons, as much as it is to laws. Consensus in an ethics of discussion is thus posed as a regulative idea; if consensus is impossible, then Ricœur argues that at least there should be an agreement on the need to avoid violence, "an agreement to disagree".⁹⁵⁸

Ricœur's definitive position in this complicated and many-sided matter is given in the conclusion to this article (and the book). As is easy to guess, it is a

⁹⁵⁵ Ricœur, "The Universal and the Historical", p. 232.

⁹⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 239-240.

⁹⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

⁹⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

very nuanced, dialectical position. He claims that universalism and contextualism are not opposed to each other on the same plane, but rather belong to two different levels (respectively, the plane of moral obligation and that of practical application) that are both needed in order for an ethical theory to be successful. He further claims that 1) universalism must be taken as a regulative idea that allows us to “recognize heterogeneous attitudes capable of being recognized as cofoundational of the common space unfolded by the will to live together”⁹⁵⁹; 2) this regulative idea only has the force of an “inchoative universal” that is supposed to act as a concrete universal – i.e., this alleged universal seeks intersubjective recognition in order to be approved as such and this recognition is obviously contextual and historical; and 3) historical and contextual identities are in turn protected from intolerance and violence precisely by a “mutual labor of understanding” that is presupposed by the universalistic attitude. And at this point Ricœur proposes the model of linguistic translation as a possibility for this labor of mutual understanding.

As we can see, Ricœur is thus divided between the two positions. I would say, but this is a personal interpretation, that he is ultimately closer to a contextualist and culturalist standpoint, because he admits that the universals are only “alleged” or “inchoative” and that they need to be transformed (as much as possible) in a concrete universal through a process of mutual understanding and recognition. This is, in fact, a somewhat Hegelian standpoint, but rather stripped down from its ahistorical pretensions. When Ricœur speaks about the transhistorical, what he seems to be assuming is that values have very precise origins in time. So they are contingent, and even though some of them might tend to claim universal validity, this validity is always dependent on their factual and historical recognition. So he does seem to assume the possibility of evolution in the domain of values, as he does in the domain of ipseity. Actually, what seems to be universal is only the need for mutual understanding, and the recognition of the community as the expression of the will to live together. The decision concerning what rules, values and norms will better accommodate that fundamental desire will be, or so I think Ricœur would argue, in each case taken by the particular community. There is no a priori decision in this matter because power and its

⁹⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

justification must be prevented from becoming ideologically reified. Amid all of this, conflict indeed plays an essential role: in disclosing the limits of the universalistic approach, in showing the need of the recognition of traditions and the value of each particular situation, and so forth. Conflict, as I have been arguing, and as will become more apparent in the next parts of this thesis, has a generating and disclosing power.

*

With this chapter on Charles Taylor's depiction of strong evaluations, hypergoods and the conflict in the making of modern identity, I conclude my brief overview of the contemporary reappraisal of conflict in philosophy, Critical Theory and pragmatic sociology. Ricœur was evidently always in the backdrop, and I mentioned his direct assessments of all these contributions, whenever they existed. This methodology entailed sometimes direct, other times indirect comparisons between Ricœur's standpoint and those of other contemporary figures, such as Habermas, Honneth, Rancière, Lyotard, Hunyadi, Rawls, Walzer, Boltanski, Thévenot, Taylor and others authors I mentioned in passing. Like in part one, even though Ricœur was always lurking in the shadows and almost always appeared at the end of each of my assessments, I did not necessarily follow his footsteps. Rather, I tried to spell out in each occasion how I looked at the assessment of conflict in these authors myself, and detected the similarities and differences with Ricœur's project. Since these authors many times dealt with topics also examined by Ricœur, I mentioned a lot of issues to which I will need to come back in the next three parts of this thesis, in a slightly different manner. My reconstruction of the contemporary reappraisal of conflict has by no means been exhaustive. An exhaustive reading is beyond my capacities. And there were surely many other relevant and more or less contemporary figures, many of them very relevant for political and social philosophy, like Derrida or Deleuze (whom I neglected to analyze completely) or Bourdieu, Foucault or Castoriadis, which I mentioned but not seriously discussed, that could have been mobilized in a thorough manner in this cartography. I did not include them, first of all, because I could not turn this section in a book-long discussion. And ultimately because I

think that the work Johann Michel already did with these authors left me with not that much to add.⁹⁶⁰

The next parts of this thesis will be written from a different perspective. If part one was a history of conflict and part two a contemporary cartography of conflict, the next parts will be the course of conflict in Ricœur's work. As such, they will assume a much more diachronic standpoint. As such, I will refrain from putting forward many of my own assessments. That is, I will conduct my own interpretations of Ricœur, but these will not be critical in character. I will be more interested in following the evolution of conflict and spelling out Ricœur's philosophy in its main traits, than in critically assessing it. Another shift in perspective will occur in parts six, seven and eight, after my diachronic presentation of the course of conflict.

Without anticipating too much, I would say that even though we saw conflict in many forms in the two preceding parts, from Marxist social conflict to Rawlsian conflict in the apportionment of social goods, not forgetting the struggle for recognition and so forth, it is difficult to find an author with a use of conflict so diverse and widespread as Ricœur. Ultimately, conflict is tied up with more overambitious claims in Heraclitus, Hegel or Marx. It is perhaps more overarching in Honneth or tied up with more extreme consequences in Lyotard, than in Ricœur. But Ricœur has so many different uses for conflict in his philosophy, and this is all encompassed by such informed and supple readings within his ultimately hermeneutic framework, that I will venture to say that conflict theory, in a broad sense, has much to learn from Ricœur. The course of conflict, to reiterate, will be broken down in three main stages: existential, hermeneutical and practical conflict. But each of these will have many different theoretical claims and practical applications, as well as some twists and turns. Let us thus now start following its path.

⁹⁶⁰ See Johann Michel, *Ricœur et ses contemporains*, *op. cit.*

Part Three

The Existential Conflict

In parts one and two I summarized some of the most important philosophical and sociological descriptions of conflict and negation in Antiquity, Modernity and in more recent times. Part three will now begin following the thread of the “course of conflict” in Ricœur’s own work, a course that we will follow in parts three, four and five of this dissertation. In this part, which roughly corresponds to Ricœur’s very first writings of the 1930s and 1940s, up until the late 1950s, in addition to laying down the coordinates of what can roughly be encompassed under the description of “existential conflict”, I also want to stress some of the overall main intuitions and early developments of Ricœur’s theoretical efforts, some of which have largely been overlooked in Ricoeurian scholarship.

In fact, Ricœur often described his intellectual work as being the result of a “path”, a “way” or a “course”, one that lets itself be guided by the unexpected detours that a person can find alongside it. Thus he claimed to stop writing or talking about a subject after he had wrote a book on that topic, so that he could “move along”: “When I have written a book on a topic, I don’t speak about it after that, as though my duty has been done in its regard, leaving me free to continue on my way. (...) it is often in the remainders from an earlier subject that I have seen the urgency of another theme.”⁹⁶¹ However, a close and attentive reading of his writings finds that often the same topics are recurrent, even if sometimes they are only alluded to. It seems as if some of the main intuitions of his work were there from the very beginning in the form of *convictions*, in some sort of *first naivety* that he recurrently submitted to the test of critique and perpetual reinterpretation. Let me mention, just to provide a small example of the way in which the topic of conflict seems omnipresent in Ricœur, that in a very early and somewhat polemical article, “Le Risque”, from 1936-1937⁹⁶², Ricœur, who was starting to

⁹⁶¹ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 76.

⁹⁶² As mentioned before, the period stemming from 1936 to 1938 is marked by a certain Marxist tone in Ricœur’s writings. In the article “Le Risque” in *Être* 1-2 (1936-37): 9-11, the tone is somewhat Marxist and Nietzschean, which only attests a certain boldness and courage of Ricœur’s thought in what were some very troubled times in Europe. This article has been put under heavy scrutiny because it served as an alleged evidence to charge Ricœur of supporting Pétain during his

become interested in the topic of the will – and this topic would become the subject of his doctoral thesis thirteen years later – already mentions the problem of the “conflict of duties” that would later become a centerpiece of his philosophical anthropology and ethics, both in *Fallible Man* and *Oneself as Another*. In fact, in this very short and very sharp article, written when Ricœur was only 23 years old, he criticizes what he calls the “rationalist” approach to human action, which would lead us to believe that by taking a “scientific” approach we could decide our course of action with the same degree of certainty with which a mathematician solves an equation. He opposes this approach to the virtue of having the courage to take risks and show resolve by acting, in the face of uncertainty.⁹⁶³

What seems interesting to me is that even in this very early text Ricœur attempts to sketch a typology of conflict, showing how conflict is an inevitable part of human life and how we can discern among the phenomena of conflict many different dimensions, from social conflict to existential conflict, not forgetting moral conflict. I will allow myself to quote a long quote of this short text, so that we can measure the degree to which the intuitions that were to inspire many significant developments in the decades to come were already, in a simplified, amalgamated but acute manner in it:

Life has taken care of dismantling our *rationalist* pretensions, otherwise than by its complexity, to summon us to courage and to risk: by facing us with opposing demands; this is what is sometimes called cases of conscience or conflicts of duties. *Conflict* and *contradiction* are the normal environment of *risk*. As soon as the conflicts of duties are

POW years at Gross-Born, in what came to be known as the alleged “Passade pétainiste de Ricœur”. This happened because the article was reprinted, alongside other texts and without Ricœur’s consent, in 1941 (at a time when he was imprisoned at the camp) in a journal officially supporting Pétain, under the heading “Paroles de Prisonniers” [words of prisoners], that is, supposed testimonies of prisoners of the *Oflag* where Ricœur was, allegedly supporting Pétain. As is widely stated, during the pre-WWII years Ricœur was a pacifist attached to the Christian left; in the years after the war, even though his relationship towards Marx became more and more moderate, and he embraced political liberalism as his definitive political stance, his leaning was always to the left. As such, even though during the imprisonment years he was certainly subject to political propaganda and a lack of information, it does not seem very likely that Ricœur ever supported Pétain. We can read Ricœur’s response to these accusations, translated by Charles Reagan, at the website of the *Fonds Ricœur*, <http://www.fondsriceur.fr/photo/Prisonner%20of%20war%20camp%281%29.pdf>. We can also read Olivier Abel’s explanation of the matter in that site. For a fuller account of the whole episode, see chapter 8 of Dosse’s biography, “Du cercle Pétain à la résistance”, pp. 94-101. This whole polemic notwithstanding, I will mention this text only for its substantial content.

⁹⁶³ Ricœur, “Le Risque”, p. 9.

felt as an inner tearing apart [*tiraillement intérieur*], conscience is awoken from its dogmatic slumber or simply from the comfortable indolence of collective conscience, that is, of the conscience of Mr-everybody [*Monsieur-tout-le-monde*].

Many conflicts are born out of exterior, social situations. Society is not homogeneous, it is divided against itself. (...) [there are] multiple social circles that overlap into one another and dispute our concern, consume us: professional, cultural, sports, artistic and religious groups, each of these circles of influence displays its own demands, which often oppose one another. It is up to each person to uphold and even to create his or her own unity, independence, originality, to risk assuming his or her *own* lifestyle. This contradiction, this conflict that is inherent to society, is a call for one to perpetually invent oneself. (...) Other cases of conscience, other calls to risk have more of an inner source, which is more personal. I am thinking about the *conflicts between ends and means* (...)

[And] conflicts become more intimate and more subtle in that region of the soul where are pitted against one another the intransigency of our principles and that tact, that sweetness, that delicate tenderness that we owe to those we love.(...) Oh, these hearts divided between the rigidity of justice and the tender frailty of forgiveness.

This is the *conflict between the person and the rule*. (...) these are the subtle tearing apart, the fine split [*déchirure*] upon which sometimes the certainty of a friendship or the harmony of a home depend. Because we do not take the risk, or because we do it *wrong*, because we cannot discern the best compromise or the best option, those that better suit the conflict, we end up sowing offenses and hatred.⁹⁶⁴

⁹⁶⁴ “La vie s’est chargée d’une autre façon que par sa *complexité*, de désarçonner nos prétentions rationalistes, et de nous inviter au courage et au risque: en nous jetant en face d’exigences contraires; il s’agit ici de ce qu’on appelle quelquefois cas de conscience ou conflits de devoirs. Le *conflit* et la *contradiction* sont le climat normal du *risque*. Lorsque les conflits de devoirs sont sentis comme un tiraillement intérieur, la conscience est réveillée de son sommeil dogmatique ou simplement de la confortable torpeur de la conscience collective, je veux dire de la conscience de Monsieur-tout-le-monde.

Bien des conflits naissent des situations extérieures, sociales. La société n’est pas un milieu homogène, mais disjoint et divisé contre lui-même. (...) [il y a] multiples cercles sociaux qui chevauchent les uns sur les autres, nous accaparent et se disputent nos soucis : groupements professionnels, culturels, sportifs, artistiques, religieux ; chacun de ces cercles d’influence a ses exigences propres et souvent rivales. Il appartient à la personne de défendre et même de créer son unité, son indépendance, son originalité, de risquer *son* style vie. Cette contradiction, ce conflit inhérent à la société, est un perpétuel appel à l’invention de la personne par soi-même. (...)

D’autres cas de conscience, d’autres appels au risque ont une source plus intérieure, plus personnelle. Je songe d’abord aux *conflits de fins et de moyens* (...)

Les conflits se font plus intimes et plus subtils dans cette région de l’âme où s’affrontent l’intransigence de nos principes et ce tact, cette douceur, cette tendresse délicate que nous devons à ceux que nous aimons. (...) Ah ! Ces cœurs partagés entre la raideur de la justice et la tendre faiblesse du pardon !

C’est le *conflit de la personne et de la règle* (...) il s’agit de ces subtils tiraillements de ces fines déchirures, d’où dépendent parfois la sûreté d’une amitié, ou l’harmonie d’un foyer. Pour n’avoir pas su risquer, ou pour avoir *mal* risqué, mal discerné le compromis, ou l’option, exactement proportionnés au conflit, nous semons blessures et haines.” Ricœur, “Le Risque”, pp. 9-10.

This passage places us at the confluence of problems dealing with history, society, and the emergence of subjectivity. In fact, even though Ricœur does not use this category at this point in time, it is already the question concerning the conditions of possibility guiding the formation of the *self* that moves him. We can discern in this praise of courage and risk a somewhat Nietzschean (or, if we really want to be anachronic, Foucauldian) tone, in that Ricœur seems to be calling for a *self-fashioning* through the adoption of one's own *style*, which reminds us of Foucault's techniques of subjectivation. More important for our own topic, we find here already both a typology of conflict (including the tension between the objectivity of justice, and the love, solicitude or forgiveness towards the fragile person) and a tentative first response to the way we should deal with it, at least at a practical level: by *daring* to decide, that is, by neither hesitating nor waiting for a perfect answer, just acting.

Significantly, Ricœur goes on to argue in the same article that "*there are no universal rules to decide a conflict of rules*" and that what is called for is a "personal tact" "an equilibrium that must in each case be original";⁹⁶⁵ as such, he is actually anticipating the much more substantive argument on practical wisdom that he would present in the ninth chapter of *Oneself as Another*, 53 years later. This is an ongoing characteristic of Ricœur's thought: he provides *diagnoses* of conflicts but often tries to answer, to the best of his abilities, to those conflicts, attempting to provide solutions for them. I will now turn to those "intimate" conflicts, the inner, existential conflicts that come to the fore in these early works, underlining the lasting influence these first explorations will assume within his theoretical framework.

Indeed, it is likely that the first decisive influence in Ricœur's philosophy, namely, *existentialism*, especially in the form it assumed in the works of Gabriel Marcel and Karl Jaspers, played a more important role than it is usually given credit to, in the context of his philosophy. From a biographical standpoint, Marcel's influence was the more decisive⁹⁶⁶ because Ricœur developed a close relationship with him, so much that during the 1930s, starting from 1934-35,

⁹⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 10.

⁹⁶⁶ For a more detailed account of these years, and of Marcel's influence in the early Ricœur, both from a personal and philosophical standpoint, see Dosse, Chapter 2 "Le cercle de Gabriel Marcel et la filiation réflexive", pp. 28-37.

Ricœur visited frequently with him, attended the Friday meetings at his house where a host of guests discussed philosophical problems and, forbidden to quote authors and texts, were enticed to “think by themselves”. Furthermore, they were encouraged to let their “personal experience” be their guiding thread; this can be considered some sort of application of Marcel’s “concrete philosophy” which we will see in more detail in this part of the thesis. In fact, at this point Ricœur discovers and reads attentively Marcel’s *Metaphysical Journal*⁹⁶⁷ and *Being and Having*.⁹⁶⁸ Marcel, who was a Christian philosopher, known for his “Christian existentialism” (even though he rejected himself the tag) was probably the first philosopher to write, even before Merleau-Ponty, about the importance of taking a subjectivist approach to the body, considering it as an incarnate “personal body” (*corps propre*) and thereby foreshadowing some of the radical conclusions that both Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur would draw from that insight, and that would significantly change, in the works of these two authors, the phenomenological approach.

As Ricœur emphasized many times, he always “walked on two legs”⁹⁶⁹ which means that he always drew both on his convictions and on critique; moreover, it also means that a fundamental part of those convictions were his religious beliefs. It is true that he often tried not to mix the genres, even claiming to be “philosophically” agnostic in his late works, but we cannot deny that he took religion to be one of philosophy’s “others”, alongside poetry, mythology and the Greek tragedy, and argued that philosophy could sometimes seek inspiration in these others. That said, the degree to which Ricœur allowed his philosophical efforts to be inspired by religion also underwent evolution. As we will see in the next chapter, at the beginning of his career, Ricœur, probably influenced by Marcel, was much closer to a “Christian” or “peri-Christian” philosophy than he was in his late works. In fact, Marcel often spoke of the “peri-Christian zones of existence” such as those that are experienced in fidelity, love and hope, and which are capable of inspiring, according to him, a philosophy of what he called “mystery”. I would argue that all these phenomena – fidelity, hope and love – remained crucial for Ricœur’s philosophy throughout his whole career and that

⁹⁶⁷ Gabriel Marcel, *Metaphysical Journal*, translated by Wall Bernard (London: Rockliff, 1952).

⁹⁶⁸ Marcel, *Being and Having*, translated by Katherine Farrer (London: Dacre Press, 1949).

⁹⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 139.

even though they lost their umbilical connection to the “secretly reconciled ontology” that Ricœur postulated in his early works, their practical value was kept in Ricœur’s later philosophy of action.

It was also through Marcel that Ricœur discovered Jaspers and his compelling notion of *Liebender Kampf*, which we will analyze in more detail below. In fact, if Ricœur was probably closer to Marcel than to Jaspers, in that the substantive content of his philosophy was very much inspired by Marcel, I would say that from a methodological viewpoint he was closer to Jaspers, namely in this notion of “loving struggle” which is ultimately one of the most existential, engaging notions of conflict that we can find. Jaspers’s notion of *paradox* also plays a key role in Ricœur’s methodology and expresses, or so I will argue, a certain style and substantive content that we will find in a more refined manner later, in Ricœur’s analysis of metaphor. However, from a methodological standpoint, the single, most important discovery for Ricœur at this point in time was Husserl’s phenomenology. In this period, that stretches from the mid-1930s to the early 1950s we can say, in a nutshell, that the conflict unfolds between the existential *thick* concepts of incarnation, engagement, dialogue, invocation, and the *methodological constraint* of phenomenology with its rigorous analyses. It is also from 1934-35 that Ricœur reads Husserl’s *Ideen*, in English translation, for the first time, the same book that he would translate into French while imprisoned during the Second World War. Ricœur thanks his friend and colleague Maxime Chastaing both for having introduced him to Marcel and for having presented Husserl’s work to him.

However, we can argue that the existential traits of Ricœur’s early philosophical standpoint are only *vestiges* of a more encompassing choice. To state the claim in a rather simple and straightforward manner, I would say that for him, *persons* always come first. This is to say that his philosophy ultimately is, as we shall see in part five, a *philosophy of human action*. The value that Ricœur grants to human beings, and his wish to put persons over and above everything else, leads him to develop a philosophical anthropology, whose first formulation, the one we can find in the post-Kantian essay *Fallible Man*, we will discuss in the third chapter of this section. This anthropology ultimately revolves around the notion of the subject, whose value and limits Ricœur would discuss up until his very last works; and ultimately this means that there is an inherent *reflective*, post-

Cartesian and post-Kantian aspect of his philosophy, which he will never let go, even though this feature will be calibrated by the conflict with the masters of suspicion that we will see in the next part.

It is important to see how these aspects ultimately form a web of interconnected notions: humanity, person, subject, existence, self, subjectivity, these are all notions whose slightly different *Sinne* all point towards very similar *Bedeutungen*, whether it is me, you, a third, or the web of connections that forms the “we” of intersubjectivity we are talking about. As such, the Ricoeurian emphasis on human action that we will find in his last books is, in a way, only a return, a “second reflection”, a coming back to the possibilities and existence of concrete human beings, after the long detour of language, hermeneutics, and the human sciences undertaken in the middle period of the 1970s and 1980s. This second coming of the reflection on human beings provides Ricœur with more tools to delve in detail into the great possibilities and inner workings of human action. However, to reiterate, some of the main intuitions have been with him from the beginning. As we shall see, conflict is pervasive throughout the whole course. Existential conflict expresses itself in my position in the world, the way I look at my body and live with it, within it, *am* it; in the conflict between the voluntary and the involuntary, the finite and the infinite, the tension between the search for truth, the rooting in being, and the rigorous methodological procedures, alongside the meticulous positing of limits. This section will deal with all these forms of conflict and will leave us at the threshold of one of Ricœur’s longstanding contributions to the history of philosophy: his radical reshaping of the hermeneutic tradition.

The first of these tensions that we will look into, that between the existential standpoint and the phenomenological method, both encompassed by a reflective philosophy, will become apparent in the first volume of his philosophy of the will: *Freedom and Nature*. However, if we are to understand the lasting impression of the existential topics in Ricœur, we will have to start from his very first books on Jaspers and Marcel.

3.1 – Existentialism and Phenomenology

In a way, Ricœur's theoretical influences in this period reflected, as was often the case, the spirit of his time. It is no wonder that the American philosophical society dedicated to Continental philosophy and founded in 1962 is called Society for Phenomenology and Existential Philosophy, precisely because these were the two main philosophical movements, in Europe, in the first half of the 20th century.

My goal in this chapter is to show the main existential topics that were fundamental for Ricœur's early philosophy, and to proceed to demonstrate how they were integrated in a reflective philosophy, how they interacted with the philosophical inspiration of Mounier's "Personalism" and how, ultimately, there was a locus of tension between these existential topics and the phenomenological method. It will become apparent, both in this chapter and in the next ones, that the existential standpoint reveals a wide array of different conflicts, playing at many levels. Nevertheless, it will become clear that Ricœur treats them very differently and also that he attempts to mediate and conciliate many of them. I will start by showing the significance of Jasper's philosophy, and proceed with Marcel.

3.1.1 – Jaspers and the loving struggle

Ricœur wrote two books on the philosophy of Karl Jaspers, one of them with his friend Mikel Dufrenne, who shared his captivity time in Gross-Born with Ricœur, when they were both Prisoners of War during World War II. Both these books were published in 1947, and the first one to be published, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence*⁹⁷⁰, was certainly prepared, at least in part, during the captivity time in Gross-Born. It is difficult to discern which parts were mainly written by Ricœur, and which by Dufrenne, but I will treat the book as a single whole and assume that Ricœur wholly subscribed to all that was written in it.

If we had to choose one single overarching notion in Jaspers's philosophy that would become fundamental for Ricœur, it can easily be argued that *loving struggle* (*Liebender Kampf*) fits that description. As is widely stated, Jaspersian

⁹⁷⁰ Mikel Dufrenne et Paul Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers et la philosophie de l'existence*, préface de Karl Jaspers (Paris: Seuil, 1947).

philosophy revolves around what he calls the “boundary situations” such as death, suffering, struggle and guilt. In these, Jaspers argues, existence is revealed to us, as we move beyond a merely empirical comprehension of our lives and understand that we are both finite and placed against a pole of Transcendence, whose “cyphers” we are called upon to “decipher”, to interpret; between these poles of existence and Transcendence, our freedom unfolds and our possibilities in the world are revealed. Rejecting all overarching principles and encompassing philosophical systems, Jaspers wants to grasp the radical *depth* of the existential experiences of those he calls the “exceptions” (individuals such as Kierkegaard and Nietzsche) and, being aware that he is not himself the exception, but not wanting to renounce to the philosophical claim for conceptual clarity, he ultimately aims to rationally reconstruct the significance of these experiences; as Ricœur and Dufrenne put it:

The ambition of existential philosophy is to unite reason and existence, reason being the search for conceptual precision, systematic concatenation and clarity, as it has been defined by the Western philosophical tradition, and existence being the sense of intimacy, drama and depth that stems from the cardinal experiences of individuals.⁹⁷¹

Philosophy will thus be defined as an “Illumination of Existence” (*Existenzerhellung*), insofar as we can say, to continue using this metaphor, that it is supposed to “shed some light”, to “give reasons”, to “give an account” (*logon didonai*, in the primordial Greek sense) to these deep existential experiences. I will not delve in detail into the specific aspects of all the boundary situations and concepts but I want to emphasize the one he calls “loving struggle” because it contains, in a nutshell, a significant account of intersubjectivity. In fact, Jaspers’s account of intersubjectivity, his “social philosophy”, we could say, is not very far from a “consensual-conflictual” analysis that, much like Habermas (or Eric Weil, for that matter), acknowledges the omnipresence of conflicts in social life but stresses the importance of overcoming these conflicts by a process of

⁹⁷¹ “La philosophie de l’existence a pour ambition d’unir la raison et l’existence, en entendant par raison la recherche de la précision conceptuelle, de l’enchaînement systématique et de la clarté telle que l’a formée la tradition philosophique de l’Occident, et par existence le sens de l’intimité, du drame et de la profondeur tel qu’il procède des expériences cardinales de l’individu.” *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

communication and dialogue. In this, Jaspers's originality consists in claiming that the whole process of communication is conflictual *through and through*, that conflict always plays a role in individuating and forming subjectivity: *Dasein kommt nur im Kampfe*.⁹⁷²

This pervasiveness of conflict also has radical consequences, namely the fragility of every intersubjective connection, and of the process of communication itself; dialogue can always fall back upon violence and if that radical possibility comes about, as Eric Weil claims, we will leave the realm of philosophy. Dufrenne and Ricœur capture well this pervasiveness of conflict in Jaspersian philosophy:

The fabric of history is woven by conflicts and wars. It is also true that if social relations unfold under the banner of struggle, this is because every person affirms him or herself at the expense of others. But, and this is the point, I cannot be myself anywhere else than in the struggle, and I must struggle in the empirical order, so that I can elevate myself to existence afterwards. Egoism and struggle are inevitable. But far from impeding communication, we will find them in there, even though transformed: egoism will be self-affirmation, struggle will be loving struggle; the problems they pose to social life will be posed to existence too and this is why communication will only be achieved in a paradoxical manner, at the price of a perpetual effort and always retaining a precarious status.⁹⁷³

Ultimately, Ricœur would not follow Jaspers all the way in this account. Specifically, he never affirmed the ethical importance of egoism, choosing to emphasize the value of hospitality; however, Jaspers's hint about the conflictual process of dialogue and communication is invaluable. On the one hand, the dialogue of existences is said to be a "reciprocal creation through confrontation"⁹⁷⁴. On the other hand, this "confrontation of existences" will have direct consequences even in the plane of non-direct communication, or what we

⁹⁷² Jaspers, *Philosophie*, II, p. 371, quoted by Ricœur and Dufrenne, p. 159.

⁹⁷³ "La trame de l'histoire est tissée de conflits et de guerres. Et il est vrai encore que si les rapports sociaux se déploient sous le signe de la lutte, c'est que chacun s'y affirme aux dépens des autres. Mais précisément je ne puis être moi que dans le combat et je dois lutter dans l'ordre empirique pour me hausser ensuite à l'existence. L'égoïsme et la lutte sont inévitables. Loin qu'ils fassent obstacle à la communication, nous les y retrouverons, transfigurés: l'égoïsme sera affirmation de soi, le combat, combat amoureux; les problèmes qu'ils posent sur le plan de la vie sociale se poseront de nouveau à l'existence, et c'est pourquoi la communication ne se réalisera que d'une façon paradoxale, au prix d'un effort constant, et avec un statut toujours précaire." Ricœur et Dufrenne, *Ibid.*, p. 159.

⁹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 61.

could call an indirect dialogue mediated by tradition, or by the act of reading. In a nutshell, the loving struggle would come to define for Ricœur the search for truth that marks a specific way of doing philosophy, the so-called “philosophizing-in-common” (*Symphilosophieren*). It is very likely that Ricœur retained from Jaspers this philosophical style, whereby the truth is sought after with the help of others, in dialogue *and* in conflict with them; in a word, the *loving struggle* is a reciprocal learning process. This process is unilateral when we are confronted with a written text, and not in the face-to-face everyday interaction, but it is not vain either. In fact, as I will show in more detail in part four of this thesis, Ricoeurian hermeneutics will develop the specific tools to stress the value of the written text and its plurivocity of meaning opened up by the processes of reception. At this point in time these conceptual tools had not yet been acquired by Ricœur, but let me say that the *intention* was there, insofar as we can assume that he and Dufrenne are subscribing to the description of *Symphilosophieren* they are making:

Dialogue is not added to existence, rather it is constitutive of existence. The truth of the other is not only left outside me, it is that truth that creates me in the struggle. Philosophy is philosophizing-in-common, *Symphilosophieren*. It is a vast exchange between the best, its truth is “communicative” (...) he or she who has not listened, commented, loved the great philosophers, has not yet become him or herself.⁹⁷⁵

I will come back to the search for truth in the early Ricœur in the fourth chapter of this part. Suffice it to say, for now, that at this point truth is the fruit of a tension, a conflict, intersubjectively constructed by struggle and dialogue. I would like to add two substantial points to this claim, both of which stemming from Jaspers, and that will both be fundamental for Ricœur: the philosophy of limits that stems from a certain type of perspectivism (even though there are important differences between perspectivism and hermeneutics that we should address) and the fact that, given the radical condition of finitude, historicity and fragility of the human being, this “truth” is always “in the making”, incomplete. To put it very simply, that it expresses itself paradoxically, dialectically, in an ever-changing

⁹⁷⁵ “le dialogue ne s’ajoute pas à l’existence mais la constitue. La vérité de l’autre n’est pas seulement laissée hors de moi, mais m’engendre dans le combat; la philosophie est philosophie en commun, *symphilosophieren*. C’est un vaste échange entre les meilleurs, sa vérité est ‘communicative’. (...) qui n’a pas écouté, commenté, aimé les grands philosophes n’est pas encore lui-même.” *Ibid.*, p. 204.

manner. Thus we will see how, via Jaspers, Ricœur comes to the same conclusions to which he also arrived by reading Kant, Kierkegaard and Jean Wahl's interpretation of Hegel.

Indeed, Dufrenne and Ricœur describe Jaspersian philosophy as being a “non-resolved dialectics”, that is, a “dialectics without a final synthesis”.⁹⁷⁶ As a consequence, they describe existential philosophy as being precisely defined by the existence of paradoxes, which, in their definition, are “living and non-resolved contradictions, without *Aufhebung*”.⁹⁷⁷ Therefore, they place existential philosophy as a philosophy of finitude, in stark contrast with Hegelian thought:

We believe that what is brilliant in existential philosophy is that it leads the way towards an ontology of the torn apart being [*être déchiré*], of limits and leaps, towards an ontology that excludes the possibility of a system, but that allows for a systematic, coherent and organized thought.⁹⁷⁸

It is thus in Jaspers's approach of historicity that Ricœur finds one of the first alternatives to Hegel. Seen from this perspective, humanity is both finite and a result of historical developments. All philosophy that wishes to escape German idealism as a form of inner delusion has to embrace the condition of finitude and to proceed from it. It is interesting to see how Ricœur uses many times the adjectives *brisé*, *fragmenté* or *déchiré* in his works, to express the fact that the quest for unity in philosophy, language, or even in one's own self is problematic, if not, sometimes, impossible. He thus stresses, in 1947, the importance of acknowledging that being is torn apart. However, he does think, in this phase, that such a philosophy is ultimately unable to hold its ground. He thus pairs the approach of paradox (with its grounding in conflict) with an approach of mystery.

⁹⁷⁶ “C'est une dialectique non-résolue, c'est-à-dire sans synthèse finale ; la philosophie existentielle confirme sa vocation en face du système hégélien.” *Ibid.*, p. 284.

⁹⁷⁷ “une contradiction vivante non résolue, sans *Aufhebung*” *Ibid.*, p. 285.

⁹⁷⁸ “nous croyons que le génie de la philosophie existentielle est de frayer la voie à une ontologie de l'être déchiré, des limites et des bonds, à une ontologie qui exclut le système et permet une systématique ordonnée et cohérente.” *Ibid.*, p. 374.

3.1.2 – Marcel, mystery and concrete philosophy

Consequently, in his second published book, this one written alone and not with Dufrenne, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers: philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe*⁹⁷⁹, Ricœur engages in a comparative approach of what he dubs a “philosophy of paradox” and a “philosophy of mystery”. In comparison with Jaspers, who is decisively a thinker related to conflict, Marcel will be more a philosopher related with the procedures of mediation and conciliation.⁹⁸⁰

Marcel wants to concentrate on what he calls the “concrete”, existential experiences of everyday life. In that, he wants to avoid what he calls “primary reflection”, which is a sort of intellectual abstraction that he associates with traditional philosophy. This is the kind of reflection that deals with concepts and that aims at producing a system, no matter how detached from reality it might be. Thus he aims at developing another kind of reflection, which he dubs “secondary reflection” and that revolves around mysteries, which are problems that implicate human beings in an existential way. I can be indifferent towards a particular problem or paradox; however, Marcel’s depiction of mystery makes it a phenomenon from which I cannot abstract because, ultimately, the mystery concerns my own being. As Patrick L. Bourgeois explains: “I cannot abstract myself from the mystery of my own being. Thus, the dimension of mystery cannot be considered merely to be a problem which cannot be solved. Rather, I am precisely what (who) is being reflected upon. On this level there is an ontological exigency at the heart of human existence which should prevent me from closing myself off into the problematic and the objective.”⁹⁸¹

Boyd Blundell sees in this “secondary reflection” the main link between the thoughts of Marcel and Ricœur. He stresses that secondary reflection is “a doubling back, a re-collection of the original situation in which the problem arose.”⁹⁸² If, on the one hand, philosophical problems (or paradoxes) pertain to

⁹⁷⁹ Paul Ricœur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers. Philosophie du mystère et philosophie du paradoxe* (Paris: Temps Présent, 1947).

⁹⁸⁰ “Telle est l’intention d’une philosophie du mystère plus que du paradoxe, c’est-à-dire d’une philosophie de la médiation et de la conciliation intérieure plus que de la déchirure” *Ibid.*, p. 43.

⁹⁸¹ Patrick L. Bourgeois, “Ricœur and Marcel: An Alternative to Postmodern Deconstruction” in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, vol. 7 no 1-2 (1995), pp. 168-169.

⁹⁸² Boyd Blundell, “Creative Fidelity: Gabriel Marcel’s influence on Paul Ricœur” in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy. Ricœur’s unstable equilibrium* (ed. André Wiercinski) (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2003), p. 91.

the domain of “having” (I have a problem, but I do not participate in it), mysteries, on the other hand, belong to the domain of being and as such cannot be escaped. It is the mystery that sends me on a quest to its solution, the solution to the mystery of my own existence, as an incarnate being. Thus the philosopher enters into a mode of exploration, and Blundell sees in this Marcellian topic a decisive influence on Ricœur’s own philosophical style of “detour” and “return”. It is true that he would develop a hermeneutic based on the “long route” and that “hermeneutics as a recollection of meaning” would be one of his main emphases in the 1960s. But we should probably add Plato’s influence to this movement of coming back, as Plato describes the movement of “second sailing” or “second voyage” in the beautiful metaphor of the *Phaedo* 99d.⁹⁸³

The consequences of this “secondary reflection” are also decisive for the domain of practical philosophy. Ricœur many times reflected upon the particular mixture of autonomy and heteronomy that makes up human beings. Not wanting to abdicate from the necessary affirmation of autonomy, he nevertheless often spoke about the constitutive heteronomy that constitutes autonomy, in what he called a “loving obedience”.⁹⁸⁴ This means that there are limits to one’s freedom, and that this freedom has certain conditions of possibility. We will explore this further in the next chapter. However, some of the roots of this conception stem directly from secondary reflection: “Secondary reflection reveals that freedom is not autonomy or, better put, that it transcends the opposition between dependence and independence – of autonomy and heteronomy – as well as the opposition between activity and passivity.”⁹⁸⁵ In fact, Ricœur sees Marcel as being mainly preoccupied with the relaxation of man in the presence of Being.⁹⁸⁶

Thus the key of Marcel’s concrete philosophy is also in its posture towards Transcendence, which he understands in a radically different manner from Jaspers’s way of seeing it. For Marcel, philosophy should entertain a privileged

⁹⁸³ Plato, *Phaedo* in *Complete Works*, 99d, p. 86. The translation reads “second best” as in, the “second best” solution to enquire on the cause; but the expression “*deuteros plous*” literally means “second sailing”.

⁹⁸⁴ Ricœur, “‘Thou Shalt Not Kill’: A Loving Obedience” in André LaCocque and Paul Ricœur, *Thinking Biblically. Exegetical and Hermeneutical Studies*, translated by David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1998), pp. 111-138.

⁹⁸⁵ “La réflexion seconde dévoile que la liberté est non-autonomie, ou plus exactement transcende l’opposition de la dépendance et de l’indépendance – de l’hétéronomie et de l’autonomie –, comme celle de l’activité et de la passivité.” Ricœur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers*, p. 227

⁹⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

relationship with Christianity and it is in the Peri-Christian zones that Existence reveals itself. As for Jaspers, his understanding of Transcendence forbids him to provide a name for it. God does not show itself, Transcendence is “hidden divinity”.⁹⁸⁷ For Jaspers, ultimately, the world is broken, divided between the two poles of freedom and Transcendence. For Marcel, the access to Transcendence is ultimately more direct and fundamental than for Jaspers.

3.1.3 – The secret conciliation

For Ricœur, the relationship between faith and philosophy, existence and Transcendence is more complicated. However, it is important to note that in these early books, even though he insists on the omnipresence of conflict and its extreme importance, he does choose to underline the other side, i.e., the doctrine that even though conflict is pervasive, a “radically torn apart philosophy is impossible.”⁹⁸⁸ This is his main objection to Jaspers. In fact, this conciliation, as defined by Ricœur and Dufrenne in 1947, posits the insufficiency of thought to grasp the whole of human existence and being:

What for thought is separated, is it not in a *certain* way reconciled? And is it not necessary for Being to be in a certain manner unified in order for the leap to still be a passage? Now, the reader of Jaspers is taken by a supreme hesitation: in many aspects, this philosophy is secretly reconciled; what he calls “historicity” unites existence with the world and the diverse attitudes that existence can have towards Transcendence *unite* existence with Transcendence (...) maybe a philosophy that is definitively torn apart is impossible, and maybe paradox always has a *union* and a participation as background, pertaining to action or feeling.⁹⁸⁹

This passage seems to indicate a certain *a priori* incapacity of theory to grasp what

⁹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 278

⁹⁸⁸ Dufrenne and Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers*, p. 385.

⁹⁸⁹ “Ce qui pour la pensée est séparé n’est-il pas d’une *certaine* façon réconcilié ? Et ne faut-il pas que l’être soit en quelque façon unifié pour que le bond soit encore un passage ? Or, une suprême hésitation arrête le lecteur de Jaspers: par bien des aspects, cette philosophie est secrètement réconciliée ; ce qu’il appelle ‘l’historicité’ joint l’existence au monde, et les diverses attitudes de l’existence à l’égard de la Transcendance *joignent* l’existence à la Transcendance. (...) peut-être qu’une philosophie définitivement déchirée est impossible et que le paradoxe a toujours pour toile de fond une *union* et une participation, de l’ordre de l’action ou de l’ordre du sentiment;” Dufrenne et Ricœur, *Karl Jaspers*, p. 379.

is more fundamental. In fact, the fundamental does not even seem to be the object of an intuition, or, for that matter, any objet whatsoever. It seems as if conflicts, and even the “loving struggle” are only the superficial layer of an inner, overall unity that only action and feeling can grasp. This is certainly not a Hegelian unity of Reason with itself. But Ricœur does state the priority of conciliations over conflicts:

If the tearing apart [*déchirure*] grants this philosophy its seriousness, on the other hand, its condition of possibility rests on the conciliations that underpin the conflicts themselves, and that make themselves recognizable in specific actions or feelings. Something *passes* from one mode of being to another. The tension between freedom and nature has as its background a unity that is simultaneously felt and wanted.⁹⁹⁰

Ultimately, this means precisely that Ricœur is more drawn to Marcel’s depiction of existence than to Jaspers’s. In fact, it is to mystery, and not to paradox, that he pledges allegiance:

Every philosophy, whether it is in the form of a system or that of a paradoxical systematics, is formed from a first kernel of experience which constitutes its living source and that ensures that its parts are connected, but that is not itself logical. Namely, the paradox that introduces *ruptures* in the movement of thought, states in disjointed terms that which is united in an ineffable manner (...) Rather, it is from a unity that is divined, foretold, recognized by the “heart” that reason tries to express through a systematics of paradox what we can state about it and that we can not characterize. *Paradox is the intellectual cover of mystery*. A radically torn apart philosophy is impossible.⁹⁹¹

What Ricœur has to say about the heart, the *thumos*, would be

⁹⁹⁰ “Si la déchirure donne son sérieux à cette philosophie, elle tire sa possibilité des conciliations qui sous-tendent les conflits eux-mêmes, et qui se font reconnaître dans des sentiments ou dans des actions spécifiques. Quelque chose *passé* d’un mode d’être à l’autre. La tension entre la liberté et la nature a pour toile de fond une unité sentie et voulue tout à la fois.” *Ibid.*, p. 382.

⁹⁹¹ “toute philosophie, qu’elle soit en forme de système ou en forme de systématique paradoxale, se constitue à partir d’un premier noyau d’expérience qui en est la source vivante et assure la liaison de ses parties, mais qui n’est pas d’ordre logique. En particulier, le paradoxe qui introduit des *ruptures* dans le mouvement de la pensée, énonce en termes disjoints ce qui est unifié d’une façon indicible (...) Mais c’est à partir d’une unité devinée, pressentie, reconnue par le ‘cœur’, que la raison tente d’exprimer par une systématique du paradoxe ce qui en peut être dit et qui reste incaractérisable. *Le paradoxe est l’enveloppe intellectuelle du mystère*. Une philosophie radicalement déchirée est impossible.” *Ibid.*, p. 385.

significantly complicated and developed in *Fallible Man*. However, this precedence of conciliation over conflict in the early works is not without significance. Ricœur will progressively tone down his ontological claims and expectations of reconciliation as his career moves forward, which results in the “postponed ontology” of *Oneself as Another*. However, this wish of conciliation (if not of total, Hegelian reconciliation) is a marked characteristic of Ricoeurian thought, which we will address in part six of this thesis. Nonetheless, this characteristic will not prevent Ricœur from diagnosing the multiple loci of conflict, the thread of which we are now following.

3.1.4 – The lasting influence of Jaspers and Marcel in Ricœur’s philosophy

Besides these two books dedicated to Jaspers and Marcel, it is very likely that many sparse elements of these two philosophies remained decisive for Ricœur’s later philosophy, often operating in silence. For example, Jaspers’s limit situations (*Grenzsituationen*) of suffering, death, fault and struggle⁹⁹² resurfaced every once in a while, and marked the tone of his philosophy. Suffering was a fundamental characteristic that Ricœur recognized in human beings, a characteristic that reveals our inner core of passivity and attests the presence of evil in the world. This was evident both in *Fallible Man* and in *Oneself as Another* so we can argue that it is a permanent feature of his philosophical anthropology. Death also remains something with which he thinks philosophy must grapple, even though he forcefully contends that the main merit is to affirm our *conatus*, our effort to persevere in existence and affirming life’s value up until death, and not anticipating it as an existential experience.⁹⁹³ Fault would be a cornerstone of the philosophical anthropology of the 1960s, both in *Fallible Man* and in the *Symbolism of Evil*. In fact, the experience of *faute*, which we can translate as fault, guilt, and error is another attestation of the existence of evil. However, what is interesting is that Ricœur would later complement this approach of fault with an approach of forgiveness (human beings can fail, they can be guilty, but they can also be forgiven because, in some way, they can be considered as being superior,

⁹⁹² Explained in detail at page 337 of *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers, op. cit.*

⁹⁹³ Ricœur, *Living up to Death*, translated by David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009).

more valuable, than the sum of their perpetrated acts) namely in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.⁹⁹⁴ And already in 1947 Ricœur reproaches Jaspers with not complementing fault with forgiveness.⁹⁹⁵ Struggle, as we have already mentioned, would remain decisive for the whole of Ricoeurian philosophy, in the form of conflict.

In the same way, the Marcellian topics of fidelity, love, calling [*appel*] and hope were fundamental for Ricœur. As we have already seen in our discussion of Post-Hegelian Kantianism, hope is all that is left for ourselves as soon as the system is gone. In *Oneself as Another*, when explaining the difference between idem-identity and ipse-identity, Ricœur makes fidelity (or the capacity to keep promises) one of the main traits of the capacity to maintain an ethical continuity of the self through time. The difference of love and justice – love being able to go beyond justice and its insistence on reciprocity – is thematized both in *Amour et Justice*⁹⁹⁶ and in Ricœur's biblical writings. And the notion of calling (or summons), even if applied only to the other in the context of an intersubjective relationship, would also be the model of a specific act of non-constrained relationship building, one that would be particularly important for Ricœur's model of recognition. And we can argue that this too is an influence stemming from Marcel.

In 1968 Ricœur conducted a series of six interviews with Marcel. These were also a way of paying homage to his longtime friend. In the last interview, Marcel suddenly evokes inter-subjectivity as a process of opening to the other, of generosity under the auspices of *agape*. Ricœur pursues that line of thought, adding: "It is the problem of intersubjectivity, of the other, that incessantly brings you back to the inexhaustible concrete: it is the act of *recognizing* the other that incessantly brings you to experience and transforms it into a proof."⁹⁹⁷ In his answer, Marcel provides us with this interesting hint: "Yes, I think you are right in using that word, *recognizing* (...) we can also think about recognition – I would

⁹⁹⁴ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, translated by Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2004).

⁹⁹⁵ Ricœur, *Gabriel Marcel et Karl Jaspers*, p. 289.

⁹⁹⁶ Ricœur, *Amour et Justice* (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

⁹⁹⁷ "c'est le problème de l'inter-subjectivité, d'autrui, qui sans cesse vous ramène vers un inépuisable concret: c'est l'acte de *reconnaître* autrui qui sans cesse ramène à l'expérience et fait de celle-ci une épreuve." See Paul Ricœur, *Entretiens Paul Ricœur – Gabriel Marcel* (Présence et Pensée) (Paris: Aubier, 1968), p. 124.

say, even about the military meaning of that word – and about recognition as gratitude.”⁹⁹⁸ And Ricœur concludes by saying “It is also in that act of recognition that we should seek the true meaning of hope, not to oppose it to experience, but in order to discern it in the thickness of experience.”⁹⁹⁹ This excerpt of the interview is interesting because it seems to contain, in a nutshell, some of the ideas that Ricœur would develop in the *Course of Recognition*, namely, the importance of recognition as gratitude, the connection with *agape* and also the way in which hope is to be connected with everyday experience.

3.1.5 – The methodological significance of phenomenology

As mentioned before, Ricœur discovers Husserl’s *Ideen* in 1934 and publishes his translation of that book¹⁰⁰⁰, with a long introduction and invaluable footnotes providing comment, in 1950, at the same time he publishes *Freedom and Nature*.¹⁰⁰¹ That introduction, which is, alongside Levinas’s work, one of the first texts on Husserl in French, has been translated into English, with an introduction by Pol Vandavelde, and published in *A Key to Edmund Husserl’s Ideas*.¹⁰⁰² In this thesis, I will not delve in detail in Ricœur’s approach to phenomenology. However, it must be said that the rigorous discipline of eidetic analyzes was formative for his philosophy and that even though he goes beyond phenomenology in many aspects, he will not refrain from engaging in phenomenological analyzes at least up until *Memory, History, Forgetting*. Thus his approach to freedom, memory, and the body (just to mention a few topics) is largely explored in a phenomenological way. The main articles, some of them using very technical terminology, that Ricœur has written over the decades, have been reprinted in

⁹⁹⁸ “Oui, je pense que vous avez raison d’employer ce terme *reconnaître*. (...) On peut tout aussi bien penser à la reconnaissance – je dirais même au sens militaire du mot – qu’à la reconnaissance comme gratitude.”, *Ibid.*

⁹⁹⁹ “C’est aussi du côté de cet acte de reconnaître qu’il nous faudrait rechercher le sens véritable de l’espérance, non point précisément pour l’opposer à l’expérience, mais pour la discerner dans l’épaisseur de l’expérience.” *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

¹⁰⁰⁰ Edmund Husserl, *Idées Directrices pour une phénoménologie*, avec introduction, traduction et notes de Paul Ricœur (Paris: Gallimard, 1950).

¹⁰⁰¹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature. The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, translated by Erazim V. Kohák (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 2007).

¹⁰⁰² See Paul Ricœur, *A Key to Husserl’s Ideas I*, translated by Bond Harris and Jacqueline Bouchard Spurlock, edited and with an introduction by Pol Vandavelde (Milwaukee: Marquette University Press, 1996).

French in *À l'école de la phénoménologie*.¹⁰⁰³ Moreover, some key concepts of Ricoeurian anthropology, such as recognition, gain in insight if proven phenomenologically.¹⁰⁰⁴

Many Ricœur scholars, and Ricœur himself, dubbed his method “Hermeneutic Phenomenology”. This is true up to a point, even though matters are far more complicated. It is true that he was one of the initiators of the “interpretive turn in phenomenology”¹⁰⁰⁵ and that through his hermeneutic method he was able to deal differently with many problems in classical phenomenology. Pol Vandavelde, for example, has argued that the Ricoeurian notion of narrative extends the bounds of phenomenology by reformulating two crucial and technical points in Husserl’s phenomenology: the passive synthesis and fulfillment.¹⁰⁰⁶ Arguing that “Ricœur’s genius is to introduce a pragmatic slant into phenomenology”¹⁰⁰⁷, he thus sees Ricoeurian hermeneutic as encompassing both methods and showing how the intentional anticipates its pragmatic fulfillment. The text of action is thus the conglomerate of intentional acts.¹⁰⁰⁸

In 1950, Ricœur’s intention was to develop in the practical domain, something equivalent to what Merleau-Ponty had accomplished in the theoretical domain with his *Phenomenology of Perception*.¹⁰⁰⁹ Ricœur himself in *Critique and Conviction* assumes this.¹⁰¹⁰ Concerning Ricœur’s early method, Don Ihde curiously speaks about a “dialectic of the diagnostic”; this is interesting, because a diagnostic seems precisely to be what Ricœur is doing at a first, descriptive level. Thus in the opening pages of *Freedom and Nature* he asserts that it “is in some ways an eidetic of the voluntary and the involuntary (...) providing we consider them simply as meanings or principles of intelligibility of the broad voluntary and involuntary functions. (...) A schematic understanding of these key functions precedes any empirical, inductive study undertaken according to experimental

¹⁰⁰³ Paul Ricœur, *À l'école de la phénoménologie* (Paris: Vrin, 1986).

¹⁰⁰⁴ See David-Le-Duc-Tiaha, “Genèse phénoménologique de la reconnaissance. La chair, l’autre et le corps propre”, in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol. 2, no. 2 (2011): 146-170.

¹⁰⁰⁵ See Gary B. Madison, “The Interpretive Turn in Phenomenology: A Philosophical History” in *Between Description and Interpretation*, edited by Andrzej Wiercinski (Toronto: The Hermeneutic Press, 2005), pp. 3-51.

¹⁰⁰⁶ See Vandavelde’s introduction to Paul Ricœur, *A Key to Husserl’s Ideas I*.

¹⁰⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁰⁰⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁰⁹ Maurice Merleau-Ponty, *Phenomenology of Perception*, translated by Colin Smith (London: Routledge, 2005),

¹⁰¹⁰ See Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 26.

methods borrowed from natural sciences. Such an immediate understanding of the voluntary and the involuntary is what we have sought to elaborate first of all”.¹⁰¹¹

In fact, in the descriptive phase of his method, Ricœur uses both the eidetic approach and the empirical approach, engaging with the sciences of his time. Thus we can say that this is his theoretical approach to the practical domain of human action and willing, in the 1950s. It is not that the existential problematic is not more fundamental; but Paul Ricœur believes that only the phenomenological method is able to shed light, to *rationalize*, so to speak, the phenomenon of human will. This can be interpreted as a first move of distancing, a movement that would later become fundamental for his hermeneutics. The next chapter will give the conflict between the voluntary and the involuntary its proper space. However, I want to argue that even in these early years, it seems that something like the subject, or the self, is already at the back of Ricœur’s mind, in that both existentialism and phenomenology are encompassed by the early development of a reflective philosophy.

3.1.6 – Personalism and Reflexive Philosophy

In the year 1934, decisive because of Ricœur’s acquaintance with Marcel and with Husserl’s writings, which we already mentioned, he also defends his *Diplôme d’études supérieures* thesis, dedicated to the topic of God in the philosophies of Jules Lachelier and Jules Lagneau [*Le problème de Dieu chez Lachelier et Lagneau*]. As he states:

In fact, the true benefit of this passage by Lachelier and Lagneau was elsewhere. Through them, I found myself initiated and in fact incorporated in the tradition of French reflexive philosophy, akin to German Neo-Kantianism.¹⁰¹²

Ricœur lists Émile Boutroux, Felix Ravaisson, Maine de Biran, Jean Nabert, Bergson and Léon Brunschvicg as the main representatives of this

¹⁰¹¹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 4.

¹⁰¹² See Ricœur, “Le jugement et la méthode réflexive selon Jules Lagneau, in *Bulletin de la société française de philosophie* (1994): 122. Quoted and translated by Eric Crump in “Between Conviction and Critique. Reflexive Philosophy, Testimony and Pneumatology” in *Ricœur as Another. The ethics of subjectivity*, ed. Richard Cohen and James Marsch (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2002), p. 171.

tradition of French reflexive philosophy. Eric Crump adds Pierre Thévenaz as a main direct influence of the style of reflexive philosophy for Ricœur.¹⁰¹³ A philosophy “without absolute”, which becomes a defining trait of post-Hegelian philosophy is also a reflexive philosophy. This, in Thévenaz’s terms, is also a statement of philosophic humility that will be incorporated, *mutatis mutandis*, in Ricoeurian philosophy. I certainly cannot sum up what is meant by “reflexive philosophy” in all these authors; however, the way it is understood and incorporated by Ricœur is in fact as being a heritage of Post-Cartesian philosophy in that it maintains that the self is a very specific kind of entity, one that exists (and which we can attest and vouch for). This self, this *ipse* is to be understood in a different manner from that in which we grasp common objects in the world. Thus, to be a reflexive philosopher, Ricœur states, is also to “resist objectification, naturalism”.¹⁰¹⁴ This would lead to Ricœur’s later distinction between *idem-identity* and *ipse-identity*.

Therefore, and to sum up the way in which these different aspects intersect with one another at this point, philosophy’s effort to describe the world (mainly phenomenologically) and to enlighten one’s personal situation (existentially) is encompassed by a reflexive method that stresses that this all takes place inside one’s consciousness and that all these acts pertain to one’s personal identity. These elements will become clearer as soon as Ricoeurian philosophy explicitly becomes hermeneutic.

Probably the single most influential representative of reflexive philosophy for Ricœur was Jean Nabert, for whose republished works *L’expérience intérieure de la liberté*¹⁰¹⁵ and *Éléments pour une éthique*¹⁰¹⁶ he wrote prefaces. In fact, as Maria Luísa Portocarrero has shown, it is in Nabert that he would find a philosophy that simultaneously stresses the importance of the self but refuses to make it a starting point, a first principle (like Descartes’s), choosing instead to follow a path to the self that goes through its acts and their symbolism.¹⁰¹⁷ Portocarrero emphasizes that for Nabert the reflexive movement is

¹⁰¹³ Eric Crump, “Between conviction and critique”, in *Ricœur as Another*, pp. 161-186.

¹⁰¹⁴ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 90.

¹⁰¹⁵ Jean Nabert, *L’expérience intérieure de la liberté* (Paris: P.U.F., 1994) (originally published in 1924).

¹⁰¹⁶ Nabert, *Éléments pour une éthique* (Paris: Aubier, 1962) (originally published in 1943).

¹⁰¹⁷ See Maria Luísa Portocarrero, “Afirmção originária e sabedoria prática na reflexão ética de Paul Ricœur” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol 2, no. 2 (2011): p. 77.

rooted in the fundamental desire to be (and in this there is a fundamental Spinozist tone) and that this primary affirmation is destined to be expressed in symbolism and testimony¹⁰¹⁸

This would have decisive consequences in *The Symbolism of Evil*, which is dedicated to Nabert, because it introduced the hypothesis that signs mediate the cogito, that is, self-knowledge, and that concrete reflection will have to make the long detour of the hermeneutic of the world. As Ricœur succinctly puts it in “Nabert on Act and Sign”: “reflection, because it is not an intuition of the self by the self, can be, and must be, a hermeneutics.”¹⁰¹⁹ This is already his refashioning of Nabert’s reflexive philosophy in hermeneutic terms, an effort that Nabert himself did not undertake. But ultimately, as Eric Crump states, “reflexion is the bond between the comprehension of signs and that of oneself.”¹⁰²⁰

The style of this reflexive philosophy animated by hermeneutics would also undergo its metamorphoses, as the object of hermeneutics gradually expanded from signs and symbols to texts and actions.

However, it seems as if in this first phase of the 1950s, the specific framing of the self was something very close to the notion of “person” as it appeared in Emmanuel Mounier’s strand of “personalism”.¹⁰²¹ Mounier was the founder of the magazine *Esprit*¹⁰²² in 1932, which remains to this day one of the most influential and read intellectual publications in France, among whose writers we find very good Ricœur scholars such as Olivier Mongin and Michaël Foessel. As François Dosse contends, we have to understand *Esprit*, and the personalist movement, in the nonconformist context of the 1930s. Mounier aims at edifying a new community and ultimately even bears the hope of bringing about a different type of civilization, one that is embedded in the Christian values of spirituality. As Dosse shows, Mounier wants to avoid two reified positions: one of a purely inner spirituality, detached from reality, and the other of a pure materiality of the world, the domain of having (which echoes Marcel). His concern is with the domain of human praxis; personalism is thus geared towards a revolution – not directly a political revolution, but a revolution in the domain of human existence. He thus

¹⁰¹⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰¹⁹ Ricœur, “Nabert on act and sign” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 222.

¹⁰²⁰ Crump, *op. cit.*, p. 179.

¹⁰²¹ On Mounier, personalism and its influence on Ricœur, see chapter 3 of Dosse.

¹⁰²² On the history of *Esprit*, see Michel Winok, *Histoire politique de la revue esprit 1930-1950* (Paris: Seuil, 1975).

aims at developing a non-university form of knowledge and intervention, therefore anticipating, in his own peculiar style, a rejection of academic philosophy that would, decades later, find echoes in the positions assumed by Sartre, Deleuze, Derrida, among others. In fact, thought as civic engagement, as ethical and political standpoint, is key for Mounier.

As for Jaspers and Marcel – and echoing Buber – the key process is here *communication*, dialogue. The personalist standpoint entails a movement towards the other, the *you*, that requires a certain decentering of the subject. We could argue that this is in agreement with Ricœur's reflexive standpoint, that finds the subject not in inner consciousness as a certainty, but takes it *as another*. With the difference that Mounier explicitly assumes for himself the role of the educator – more than the revolutionary – which was never the case for Ricœur. And even though Mounier distances himself from Marxism (in spite of also assuming its influence) the truth is that his alleged position as an educator is in some aspects close to the position of Luckács, in that the theoretician is also, in some sort, the political organizer. What Mounier has in mind though is some sort of recovery of the values of the Renaissance, over against the materialism and the dehumanization of the following centuries. He argued for a return to community life, and, in a way, the community he set up for himself and for the members of *Esprit* at Châtenay-Malabry (the place known as *Les Murs Blancs*), and where Ricœur himself lived with his family for most of his life, was a partial fulfilling of that dream.

In 1950, shortly after Mounier's premature death, Ricœur wrote an article dedicated to him and to his philosophy: "Emmanuel Mounier: A Personalist Philosopher", republished in *History and Truth*.¹⁰²³ In this article, he distinguishes roughly two main phases in Mounier's intellectual production: the pre-war years and the postwar years. He stresses that in the beginning (years 1932-1934) personalism was directly geared towards the goal of bringing about a more communitarian lifestyle: "Personalism: in the beginning a pedagogy concerning communal life linked to an awakening of the person."¹⁰²⁴ But he also mentions that Mounier's last productions transform personalism into a philosophy which is

¹⁰²³ See Ricœur, "Emmanuel Mounier, a Personalist Philosopher" in *History and Truth*, pp. 122-161.

¹⁰²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 136.

much closer to the philosophies of existence. The difference with Marxism is that Mounier charges Marxism of being less than an awakening and less than a pedagogy. He sees Marxists as waging that the future society will be brought about by the economic and political changes; however, he thinks, they do not stress with enough force the attraction exercised *here and now* by the revolutionary values preached by the pedagogue. Ricœur sums up this debate as follows: “Here is the core of the debate: the conviction of personalism is that one does not progress *toward* the person if the person is not *in the beginning* what demands, what presses on in the midst of the revolt of the famished and afflicted.”¹⁰²⁵

One of the most interesting aspects is to see how, ultimately, “person” and “existence” are two different but similar notions operating within Ricœurian philosophy at this point. At the end of this article, he sums up these two approaches:

First, person and existence refer primarily to two orders of preoccupation which are not exactly co-extensive: on the one hand, there is an ethico-politico concern, a “pedagogical” intention in touch with a crisis of civilization; on the other hand, there is a critical and ontological reflection in contact with classical “philosophical” tradition.

Second, the word person is a way of designating one of the interpretations of existence, once one is situated in the strictly critical and ontological level of the philosophies of existence.¹⁰²⁶

Ultimately, what remains important for Ricœur is the notion of “person”, to which he would come back many times, in his discussions of Kantian practical philosophy and phenomenology. Indeed, reassessing Personalism three decades later, in an article called “Meurt le personnalisme, revient la personne...”¹⁰²⁷ (originally pronounced in a symposium to celebrate the fiftieth birthday of *Esprit*) Ricœur shows how the demise of “Personalism” as a philosophical movement, well confirmed by that time, does not entail the disappearance of the importance of the notion of person. Ricœur acknowledges, in that article, that Personalism did not have enough theoretical consistency to affirm itself in the way other “isms”,

¹⁰²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 144.

¹⁰²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

¹⁰²⁷ Ricœur, “Meurt le personnalisme, revient la personne...” in *Esprit* 50,1 (1983), pp. 113-119.

such as Marxism or Existentialism managed to do; however, he also emphasizes that at that time, the importance of the person as the support for a specific perspective and aspiration remained valid. In an indirect manner, the development of bioethics in the following decades ultimately proved him right, as the discussions taking place around the status of the embryo and its rights pushed for a redefinition of the status of the person itself.

However, what I want to underscore, to reiterate, is that notions such as existence, identity, self, person, ipse, reflexion, subjectivity, are very closely related, and that they ultimately form a semantic web in the context of Ricoeurian philosophy. They are the core of his philosophical anthropology, which we will discuss in more detail in this and the following parts of this thesis. However, if we are to sketch the portrait of Ricœur's depiction of human kind, we might as well begin by his discussion of our fundamental attributes. Freedom is one of them. And thus the next shape conflict will assume is that of the tension between the voluntary and the involuntary.

3.2 – The Conflict Between Voluntary and Involuntary

In *Freedom and Nature*¹⁰²⁸ Ricœur undertakes phenomenological analyzes of the acts of willing in their many forms.¹⁰²⁹ The major, most significant inner conflict that is shown by this eidetic approach is that between what is voluntarily willed and the elements of irreducible involuntary in us. This approach lays the ground for the first developed form of philosophical anthropology that we will see in detail in the next chapter.

The *Philosophy of the Will*, at least in its two first volumes, remains in a post-Kantian framework. The English translation of *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, which emphasizes that the debate is largely between the possibility of *freedom* amid the necessity imposed by *nature*, reveals, better than the French original, this framework. Indeed, we could argue that like Kant, Ricœur is trying to uphold the existence and specificity of human freedom – not understood as a *Reich der Zwecke* as in Kant – and to reconcile it with the objective laws of physical and human nature. This is the reason why, alongside phenomenology, Ricœur also draws on psychology and the natural sciences. He is not, in any way whatsoever, stepping away from the empirical data on human beings provided by science. But he is in fact refusing to accept that these results deplete what can be meaningfully be said about us, because he is indeed repudiating *objectivism*, avoiding that we be reduced to a mere object, and that the first-person perspective be completely swallowed by the objective description. Don Ihde has an interesting way of assessing this method: “In its first appearance Ricœur’s dialectic is double-focused, suggesting the use of a geometrical metaphor. From two fixed points at least two figures are possible. The first is a set of partly overlapping circles; the

¹⁰²⁸ In this chapter I am following the translation of Erazim V. Kohák; however, I am also comparing it with the French original and sometimes emphasizing the subtleties of the French text.

¹⁰²⁹ *Freedom and Nature* is the most comprehensive and exhaustive take of Ricœur on the phenomenology of the will, but the same topic is dealt with in several other smaller texts. See also the collection of these texts, republished in Paul Ricœur, *Écrits et Conférences 3: Anthropologie Philosophique* edited by Johann Michel et Jérôme Porée (Paris: Seuil, 2013), and namely “L’unité du volontaire et de l’involontaire comme idée-limite”, pp. 95-122; “Le problème de la volonté et le discours philosophique”, pp. 123-146; and “Phénoménologie du vouloir et approche par le langage ordinaire”, pp. 147-171. This last text, originally written in 1971 is interesting because it sums up the way in which Ricœur’s attention to ordinary language philosophy, which we will see in more detail in the next part of this thesis, comes to be an interesting complement to the phenomenological analysis of action. On this first phase of Ricœur’s philosophy, see also David M. Rasmussen, *Mythic-Symbolic Language and Philosophical Anthropology. A Constructive Interpretation of the Thought of Paul Ricœur* (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1971).

second is an ellipse. In the case of *Freedom and Nature* one point or focus is clearly weighted centrally as an eidetic phenomenology. But against this focus are played a series of counterfoci all of which have in common a type of objectivism (empirical psychology, psychoanalysis, and biology among them).”¹⁰³⁰

3.2.1 – The overarching role of conflict and its alleged inner (re)conciliation in Transcendence

The conflict at the heart of human freedom is one which must be dealt with and explicated, because its result decides what are the proper limits to human action and what we can, or cannot, legitimately expect to accomplish. And conflict is here at stake at both an ontological and a methodological level. Ontologically, as we have seen, it is the torn, broken status of existence itself:

Existence tends to break itself up. In effect the advent of consciousness is always to some degree the disruption of an intimate harmony.¹⁰³¹

This disruption, according to Ricœur, will be reflected in the many levels in which our free will is mixed with involuntary elements that determine us in some sort. In fact, conflict will have an exploratory and even revelatory power because it will help explore and draw the limits of our will. Because our freedom will often crash into the resistance offered by the involuntary in its many forms. Thus Ricœur explicitly declares that

bit by bit the relations of the involuntary to the voluntary reveal themselves in a perspective of *conflict*. [de proche en proche les rapports de l’involontaire au volontaire se révèlent sous le signe du *conflit*.]¹⁰³²

In this passage, “se révèlent sous le signe du conflit” also means: *are revealed by conflict*. Because human freedom is not absolute freedom, the resistance offered to the human will, and the effort to overcome that resistance, shows us exactly the

¹⁰³⁰ Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology. The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1971), p. 16.

¹⁰³¹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 17.

¹⁰³² *Ibid.*, p. 18.

specificity and the extent of our possibilities.

Nevertheless, we are far from being able to say that conflict has the last word in the *Philosophy of the Will*. We have seen in the previous chapter that Ricœur and Dufrenne reproached Jaspers for emphasizing the role of conflict and ultimately producing an utterly broken philosophy; they also affirmed the “secret” inner reconciliation of that philosophy. In 1950, in *Freedom and Nature*, Ricœur remains within the same framework:

The act of Cogito is not a pure act of self-positing: it lives on what it receives and in a dialogue with the conditions in which it is itself rooted. The act of myself is at the same time participation.

Thus the intention of this book is to understand the mystery of reconciliation, that is, as restoration, even on the clearest level of consciousness, of the original concord of vague consciousness with its body and its world. In this sense the theory of the voluntary and involuntary not only describes and understands, but also restores.

From the point of view of method, this final deepening of our quest opens the way for a consideration of the paradox. Consciousness is always in some degree both a disruption and a bond. This is why the structures which connect the voluntary and the involuntary are structures of rupture as well as of union. Behind these structures lies the paradox which culminates in the paradox of freedom and nature. (...)

But then what prevents the paradox from being destructive? How can freedom help being annulled by its very excess if it does not succeed in recovering its connection with a situation which would in some sense sustain it? A paradoxical ontology is possible only if it is covertly reconciled. (...)

Thus this study of the voluntary and the involuntary is only a limited contribution to a far broader schema which would be the reconciliation of a paradoxical ontology in a reconciled ontology [Ainsi cette étude du volontaire et de l’involontaire est une contribution limitée à un dessein plus vaste qui serait l’apaisement d’une ontologie paradoxale dans une ontologie réconciliée.]¹⁰³³

This somewhat long passage has the merit of summing up the context in which Ricœur is placing his project of a philosophy of the will. On the one hand, there is an implicit mentioning of his indirect reflexive philosophy: the affirmation of the cogito stems from its participation in something other than itself. On the

¹⁰³³ *Ibid.*, pp. 18-19. [Modified translation. Kohák translates “the reconciliation of a paradoxical and a reconciled ontology”.]

other hand, philosophy is a paradox wrapped in a mystery, that is, a theory that presents itself paradoxically but which is secretly reconciled in a union with Being itself.

However, we must say that this ontological vehemence notwithstanding, *Freedom and Nature* does not really take a definitive step towards this “reconciled ontology”, whatever is meant by that somewhat vague expression. And this because, as Ricœur announces shortly after this passage, this book refrains from analyzing fault [*faute*] and Transcendence as such:

The fault remains an alien body in the essential structure of man. There is no principle of intelligibility of such disruption, analogous to the *mutual intelligibility* of involuntary and voluntary functions, in the sense that their essences complete each other within the human unity. The *fault is absurd*.¹⁰³⁴

We cannot suspend the fault without suspending Transcendence.¹⁰³⁵

Transcendence will appear to us later as an absolute positing of a presence which constantly precedes my own power of self-affirmation, even when the latter always seems to be on the verge of engulfing it. This is why the connection of Transcendence and freedom inevitably appears paradoxical. It will be the task of the third volume of this *Philosophy of the Will* to bring the difficulties of that paradox into full light. (...) But the paradox of freedom and Transcendence can be sustained only as a mystery which it is the task of poetics to discern.¹⁰³⁶

Throughout his whole career, Ricœur always affirmed that *fault* is not primordial. The Kantian claim that even though evil is radical, it is not originary, resonates strongly with him. Thus he believes in human being’s original innocence and he wagers the reconciliation in that innocence. However, if it is true that he thoroughly analyzed fault in the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*, namely in the *Symbolism of Evil*, the truth is that the projected third volume was never written. Thus the “poetics of the will” and the volume that would explicitly define Transcendence and show its intrinsic connection with human existence and

¹⁰³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

¹⁰³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹⁰³⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 32-33.

freedom was never more than a project. This means that Ricœur was unable – or, more probably, that he chose not – to philosophically ground this reconciled ontology.

Some have argued, and they are probably right, that even though this volume never saw the light of day, we can consider the hermeneutic works of Ricœur as the replacement of that book, in that they explicitly deal with the “poetic” function of language and also radically redefine the understanding and explanation of human action. These aspects are well depicted, but I would also emphasize that the difference between these works, which we will see in the next part, and the projected third volume of the *Philosophy of the Will* is that the former do not (explicitly or implicitly) place themselves in the standpoint of Transcendence. In fact, what this means is that Ricœur progressively tones down his ontological claims. It also means that conflict and (re)conciliation are probably omnipresent in Ricoeurian philosophy but that their balance of forces changes with time. If, roughly until 1960, we can say that in Ricœur’s philosophy there is this presupposition of a reconciled ontology that does not necessarily express itself in thought but that might as well do it, it seems that the same conditions do not apply from that point on. And because in fact Transcendence is not explicitly defined nor explored as such, what we are left with, in *Freedom and Nature* and the subsequent books, is a thorough exploration of philosophy and its limits, its others, under the banner of the multiform phenomena of *conflict*.

Freedom and Nature is a good example of the abovementioned claim. The book has three parts: 1) Decision: Choice and its Motives; 2) Voluntary Motion and Human Capabilities; and 3) Consenting: Consent and Necessity. And this because, according to Ricœur, “to want” fundamentally means three different things: 1) I decide [something]; 2) I move my body and 3) I consent [to something]. Decision is, according to this analysis, the first moment of the voluntary act, the one which forms a project – defined as “that which is to be done”.¹⁰³⁷ But decisions are not taken abstractly. Decision is complemented by action; finally, there might be an active decision that does not create an alternative to the existing state of affairs but that nonetheless is a decision: that of consenting to it.

¹⁰³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 42.

The reciprocity between voluntary and involuntary is shown by the fact that at each stage the voluntary will find that it has what is involuntary as its background and even as its condition of possibility. So motivation will be the involuntary aspect of decision: the body has involuntary organs and muscles which function without the intervention of my will; finally, the third part will deal with character, the unconscious and life itself, all three being aspects which I can not choose myself (I can not choose the fact of being born here and at this time, who my parents are, the way my body is and functions) and to whose necessity I must ultimately consent.

Concerning this reciprocity between the voluntary and the involuntary, and more specifically the diagnostic of the involuntary that Ricœur is making with the help of phenomenology and the natural sciences, Ihde speaks about a “latent hermeneutics”, that is, already a detour and some sort of “conflict of interpretations”. According to Ihde: “The door is opened to a dialectic between phenomenological and objective universes of discourse, and in the conflict of these separate theories the latent hermeneutics of *Freedom and Nature* emerges.”¹⁰³⁸ Why is it latent, how does it operate? According to Ihde, Ricœur takes objective characteristics as signs for obscure or border experiences pertaining to the involuntary.¹⁰³⁹ In this way, he *diagnoses* the involuntary. However, he also shows that the diagnostic is not vague and imprecise, precisely since it is replaced within the totality of human experience, and because the objective sciences will also help determine its borders: “But since the dialectic involved in the diagnostic occurs at the borders of experience, in the vague and obscure, a second process involves the locating and mapping of these borders.”¹⁰⁴⁰ It was the task of the books from the 1960s to make hermeneutic explicit. But let us first take a closer look at the multiple forms of conflict which are here at stake.

¹⁰³⁸ Don Ihde, *Hermeneutic Phenomenology*, p. 29.

¹⁰³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30.

¹⁰⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 31.

3.2.2 – The conflict of values and modes of life

Part one of this book¹⁰⁴¹ deals with the relation between decision – and it undertakes its eidetic description –, motivation and what is called the “corporeal involuntary”. Ricœur claims that every decision has a motivation. However, he also stresses the distinction between motives and causes, a topic in which he would delve in more detail as soon as he started reading and discussing post-Wittgensteinian analytic philosophy. However, motivation does not have to be voluntary. So Ricœur takes the example of the corporeal needs like hunger. Hunger makes me want to eat, but does not *force* me to do so. I can choose not to. Thus the whole chapter two¹⁰⁴² of part one deals with the utter complexity of motivation and the way it can reflect itself on values. Ultimately, the difficult path of one’s freedom will be made of the persisting conflicts between different values (embodying different motivations) and which can eventually lead to different lifestyles.

When Ricœur starts discussing motives and values on the “organic level”¹⁰⁴³ he asserts that “on the human level, organic life is undoubtedly a cluster of *heterogeneous* demands, revealing *discordant* values.” Therefore, there is a complexity of values on the organic level. For instance, even though pleasure is usually considered good, and pain bad, there are moments in which one can choose to be *courageous*, to *endure* pain and suffering, for the sake of a different value. As Ricœur states: “it seems that bodily existence reveals other values than those of pleasure and pain”.¹⁰⁴⁴ For example, what is easy is usually considered to be good, because it is interpreted as “the absence, or, better, the cessation of an obstacle or an impediment.”¹⁰⁴⁵ Nonetheless, Ricœur stresses the viability of the opposing possibility, that of taking the difficult as the embodiment of the good.

This possibility is more rare than the preceding, opposing one. However, it is not without a certain tradition and even a certain poetic quality: it might be the way of the hero. Thus Ricœur recalls the quality of *struggle*, a struggle which can be more than the Hegelian struggle for recognition, it can assume the Nietzschean

¹⁰⁴¹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, pp. 35-197.

¹⁰⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 85-134.

¹⁰⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 104 ff.

¹⁰⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 110.

¹⁰⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 112.

quality of the struggle for power in the context of the affirmation of the *will to power*. It is worthy to quote the beautiful passage in which Ricœur depicts this possibility:

Not having suffering in any form as its opposite pole, the pleasure in an obstacle never reaches the form of plenitude, of elimination of pain, of liberation from hindrances, in a word, of repose. It is the genuine pleasure of movement which alone reveals the authentic tensions of life beyond the twin avarice of desire and fear. It alone testifies to the heroic dimension, the Don Quixotic dimension of life contrasted to a Sancho Panza who is guided solely by the pleasures of possession, freedom from suffering, and ease. (...)

In effect the taste for obstacles is a tendency towards choosing suffering itself and sacrificing the pleasure of possession to the pure pleasure of conquest. This pleasure then adds to the more elementary values of food and the complementing sex, the values of struggle, which are still vital and spontaneous but also, in a way, uninterested and utopian. [ce plaisir ajouterait donc aux valeurs plus élémentaires de l'aliment et du sexe complémentaire, les valeurs encore vitales et spontanées, mais en quelque sorte désintéressées et utopiques de la lutte.]¹⁰⁴⁶

Ricœur concludes this section by affirming that “there is no organic order”¹⁰⁴⁷, but rather a multiplicity that must be clarified and unified by a decision, a choice. Thus choice becomes a moral problem, because in virtue of the specific content of the value we choose, we are also choosing our own lifestyle. Do we want to be Don Quixote or Sancho Panza?

In the following pages Ricœur asserts the value of intersubjectivity: “In the last analysis, it is the other who counts”¹⁰⁴⁸, because the subject is not solipsistic. However, what this reveals is that “organic” values are not the only ones that we have to bear in mind. Ricœur therefore asserts that in the multiplicity of the organic values they are not only in conflict with one another, but also in conflict with social values.¹⁰⁴⁹ Other people, taken as fellow citizens, bearers of rights, are not only measured against the value of my life, but also against the backdrop of society as a whole, taken as a value. This, according to Ricœur, forces the need for a choice, of our own values, in our own life.

¹⁰⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 119-120 [Modified translation].

¹⁰⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁰⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 128.

¹⁰⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 129.

3.2.3 – The conflict of duties and the value of happiness

This move, from organic to social values, and the emphasis on the conflict among them, forces Ricœur to enter in a Kantian framework, as would later be the case in the little ethics of *Oneself as Another*. We have already mentioned how in 1936-1937 he hinted at the conflict of duties. Now, in 1950, we see his second coming to the topic, delving into it in more detail. On the one hand, Ricœur acknowledges the presence of a conflict between happiness and duty.¹⁰⁵⁰ On the other hand, he also argues that Kant has overemphasized the formal value of the universalization of our maxims and claims that the Kantian ethic must be encompassed by “a phenomenology which goes beyond the *opposition* of reason and sensibility.”¹⁰⁵¹ This because sensibility must be able to be recognized by reason as being a motive, and also because reason must, in turn, be able to *move* us in some sort (which is what the feeling of *respect* for the law does in the context of Kantian practical philosophy).

But duty itself is splintered in many conflicting imperatives. The third chapter¹⁰⁵² of part one focuses on hesitation and choice. Ultimately, he describes the transition from hesitation to choice by developing a phenomenology of attention.¹⁰⁵³ However, the interesting aspect for the topic with which we are dealing here is the description of the conflicts of duties that cause us to hesitate. Hesitation stems from an impossibility to establish an absolute hierarchy between values. In this, an interesting aspect of Ricœur’s perspectivism is revealed:

If we now observe that all value is relative, that every “good” is a “better” we can sense that the difficulties concerning the idea of a totality arise once more in the notion of a hierarchy: the comparison of two or more values is always moving and incomplete, new points of view can always be considered, the evident hierarchy depends in part on knowing what “horizons” will be determined, that is, what values left in the shadows will be carried to the center of consciousness. The incompleteness of the totality makes the

¹⁰⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 130.

¹⁰⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 131.

¹⁰⁵² *Ibid.*, pp. 135-197.

¹⁰⁵³ See also Ricœur’s early phenomenological study of attention: Ricœur, “L’attention” in *Écrits et Conférences 3: Anthropologie Philosophique*, *op. cit.*, pp. 51-93.

hierarchy precarious. The search for a hierarchy always remains an indefinite process.¹⁰⁵⁴

This means that at least to some extent, the rejection of totality at the theoretical level (exemplified by the rejection of Hegelian Absolute Knowing) also bears at the practical level. As new points of view can be considered at a theoretical level – and this is decisive for Ricoeurian hermeneutics – also new points of view concerning values can shift the horizons in which we evaluate. And therefore, we can change our mind. And when we have not chosen yet, phenomenologically, we hesitate.

This does not mean that we do not choose. We do. But every choice is personal, and this is why we can speak about “moral creativity”¹⁰⁵⁵ in Ricoeur:

We must constantly invent some original progression in order to embody a principle in an action which is in some respects without precedent, and this invention retains an irreducible character of inexactness.¹⁰⁵⁶

This invention is made amid what he describes as a “chaos of values”¹⁰⁵⁷ because we also have in ourselves, or so he claims, the whole history of socially conflicting values that made up our societies. Thus we are influenced by a “feudal conscience gravitating around honor and knightly heroism, a Christian conscience centered on love and forgiveness, a bourgeois conscience whose tone is set by ideas of liberty and toleration, a modern conscience enamored of justice and equality”.¹⁰⁵⁸ In sum: “all the ages of mankind are thus represented within our consciousness.”¹⁰⁵⁹

Since it is not productive to assume the standpoint of the D. Juan who courts every type of consciousness and gravitates around several of them without really choosing, we have to navigate among them and choose our values as best as we can. This bears testimony to the fact that “society is not a homogeneous milieu, but is disjointed and divided against itself (...) social topography projects itself in

¹⁰⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹⁰⁵⁵ On this topic, see John Wall, *Moral Creativity. Paul Ricoeur and the Poetics of Possibility* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2005).

¹⁰⁵⁶ Ricoeur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 147.

¹⁰⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 148.

¹⁰⁵⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

contradictory affective signs and painful alternatives.”¹⁰⁶⁰ The individual thus appears as being torn apart by professional, cultural, sports, artistic and religious groups (among others) and forced to “dare his own style of life”. As Ricœur claims: “The person arises from his distortion among the conflicts of duties.”¹⁰⁶¹

The rest of this page repeats some formulations that Ricœur had published thirteen years before in the article “Le risque” that I mentioned before. Ultimately, this comes down to the conflict between the person and the rule, love and justice. All these topics would later resonate strongly in Ricoeurian practical philosophy. In fact, these small passages from pages 147-149 of *Freedom and Nature* contain some intuitions that would be further developed in whole books some 40 or 50 years later. What is interesting to note is that at this point, Ricœur grants social conflict a sort of epigenetic function: the person arises from the conflict of duties. The fact that we are forced to choose, to give a personal imprint to our life’s path and the values it assumes, is in fact the positive outcome of the process of conflict. It is, therefore, a dialectical beginning: personality stems from history and from an act of decision.

Ricœur proceeds by phenomenologically describing the way out of confusion of the “chaos of values” by the phenomenon of attention and the event of choice, which stops attention and makes the irruption of a project possible. Ricœur reiterates that conflict “awakens” conscience; he also claims that the “conflict of duties” is the normal situation of conscience, not its limit-case.¹⁰⁶² However, differently from the solution that he would find in his later philosophical anthropology, the characteristic that now provides a solution and leads to choice, is actually a virtue: generosity.

These conflicts allow of no solution other than choice. An extended rationalization hardens them into rigid alternatives, personal meditation consecrates them into impasses. There is a point at which there exist no rules for resolving the conflict of rules. Such conflict has at least the virtue of awakening socialized consciousness to itself and saving it from rational automatism. It calls for personal initiative and invention capable of constituting at most a limited jurisprudence, a provisional morality which always remains revocable. Generosity, in Descartes’ sense, means not only loving the good, but also

¹⁰⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 174.

deciding amid confusion and conflict what is better, here and now, for me.¹⁰⁶³

Descartes's "provisional morality" is certainly a problematic notion and in this, Ricœur distances himself a lot from Kantian morality. However, it is this lack of absolute certainty that provides existence with a certain interest. Freedom entails risk. My hierarchy of values, and my decisions, are only that: *mine*. In choosing something, I choose myself. Moreover: choice, and hesitation, are a sign of finitude; since my understanding is limited and finite¹⁰⁶⁴ and therefore I cannot entirely deduct the results of my decision, and given the fact that I am many times under the constraint of urgency, I am forced to choose. So we can see that a more-or-less Cartesian provisional morality is, at this point of Ricœur's philosophy, deduced from the diagnosis of human finitude stemming from Kant, from phenomenology and from existential philosophy.

Ultimately, Ricœur characterizes this way out of the confusion of values and duties by the appearance of a preference in the web of conflicting motives¹⁰⁶⁵ and its realization in what he calls a reconciliation in the act.¹⁰⁶⁶ By acting I open up the way for my life to go on and cease hesitation. However, nothing prevents the process from taking place all over again, because if the choice is *my* choice, it can nevertheless still change.

3.2.4 – The conflict between passion and law

Part two of *Freedom and Nature*¹⁰⁶⁷ explores the meaning of acting, moving the body and all the involuntary aspects attached to it, such as the "preformed skills" [*savoir-faire préformés*] (that is, reflexes), contains dense and beautiful, almost poetic analyzes of emotions (surprise, joy, sadness, desire, shock, passion) and detailed descriptions of habit. However, it is in chapter three, "Moving and Effort"¹⁰⁶⁸ that we find what Ricœur dubs the "fundamental conflict": that between passions and the law.

This analysis is prepared by an analysis of resistance. The resistance of

¹⁰⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 173.

¹⁰⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

¹⁰⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

¹⁰⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 181.

¹⁰⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 199-337.

¹⁰⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 308-337.

the body to my own will is, according to Ricœur, a “crisis of the unity of the self with itself.”¹⁰⁶⁹ And what causes this crisis, this lack of unity, are precisely the passions: “It is due to passions that conflict appears as the ultimate verdict on man”.¹⁰⁷⁰ Stepping up a notch in this description, he states that it is the conflict between law and passion that “gives resonance to every dramatic description of man.”¹⁰⁷¹

Passions show me that I am not the master of myself, in myself. This is what is shown to us, with an incredible poetic force, by Greek tragedy. Passions and emotion appear as impediments: “the principle of passion is bondage I impose on myself, the principle of emotion is wonder to which I submit”.¹⁰⁷² And when confronted by resistance, the human being’s response can be none other than *effort*. Both passion and emotion tend to prevent me from freely exercising my will but Ricœur claims that we are able to regain a certain mastery over ourselves, either by playing one passion against another, or through habit:

Descartes showed admirably that the art of living lies in part in playing one “passion” against another; thus the will acts against the emotion it *resists* in its very visceral stronghold by giving itself indirectly to the involuntary spontaneity of an allied docile *emotion*.

But this aid of one emotion against another emotion constituted as an obstacle is itself exceptional. Bare effort would be ineffective without the mediation of the pacificatory function par excellence – habit.¹⁰⁷³

However, the fact that there might be a solution to these conflicts does not diminish the dramatic effect that they bear. Françoise Dastur emphasizes that when the involuntary assumes the form of necessity and the untamable nature, conflict is in fact turned into drama.¹⁰⁷⁴

¹⁰⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 310.

¹⁰⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 312.

¹⁰⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 314.

¹⁰⁷⁴ “Lorsque l’involontaire prend la forme de la nécessité et de l’immaîtrisable nature et apparaît alors sous la figure d’une puissance hostile, le conflit se transforme en drame.” See Françoise Dastur, “Volonté et liberté selon Paul Ricœur” *Cahiers de L’Herne, Paul Ricœur* (Paris: Éditions de l’Herne, 2004), p. 185.

3.2.5 – Unconscious conflicts

There is another conflict to which Ricœur alludes briefly in this book, a conflict that runs even deeper than passions and emotions: the conflict in psychic life. In part three of *Freedom and Nature* he is dealing with the problematic of consenting to necessity. He traverses all the problems posed by life itself and by the individual constitution of the particular human being that I am, with my specific character and inner life, and he confronts himself with the methodology of the natural sciences and with psychology. Eventually, he reaches the problem of the unconscious and for a moment already hints at the hermeneutic hypothesis, by briefly mentioning that “Nietzsche (...) had the vivid feeling that consciousness is a surcharged text, that self-knowledge is an infinite reflexion which in its ferocity never ceases to strike down masks, to wipe off make-up.”¹⁰⁷⁵ However, he does not pursue, at this point in time, this line of thought to its last consequences. But he does take one important consequence: the affirmation that consciousness is not transparent to itself and, therefore, that we need a *detour* to understand it.

And Ricœur delves, for the first time in a systematic manner, in the unconscious and in Freudianism. And so, he is forced to consider the possibility of taking unconscious life itself as the ultimate seat of conflicts:

A new type of intelligibility suggests itself if instead of taking the viewpoint of the subject’s intentions we now deal with these phenomena as objects and approach them from a causal viewpoint. In this way it is possible to see in them signs or *effects* which reveal certain hidden affective tendencies. The psychoanalytic method thus consists of gathering indications whose convergence leads us to the hidden *cause*. Once we adopt this perspective it is possible to consider the psyche as a locus of conflict, that is, of mutually opposing and inhibiting forces. Repression is the most remarkable case of this fundamental phenomenon of intersection of psychic forces.¹⁰⁷⁶

At this point, in 1950, Ricœur heavily insists on the “mechanical”, “objective” and causal aspect of the Freudian explanation. When analyzing the pathological cases described by psychoanalysis, he mentions the “quasi-physical language” of

¹⁰⁷⁵ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 374 [Modified translation].

¹⁰⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 381.

“endopsychic conflicts”.¹⁰⁷⁷ He seems to accept the possibility that some of these phenomena are accurate: “The possibility of psychosomatic illness is inscribed in the nature of these unconscious conflicts at the same time. A disorder is possible when we confront a plurality of forces.”¹⁰⁷⁸ But he seems much less ready to accept what he calls “Freud’s realism” and the causal model of the unconscious. Ultimately, his diagnosis of psychoanalysis is mostly critical, as he is not ready to fully accept a style of suspicion.

Consequently, he claims that:

*It is I who think, give meaning, weigh my motives, wish, and move my body. This assurance, infected with the suspicion that I am acting out a comedy on the stage of a mythical opera and am a dupe of a conjuration of hidden forces in some mysterious wings of existence – this assurance, that “I” which I was tempted to sacrifice into the hands of the decipherers of enigmas, must be won back constantly in the *sursum* of freedom.*¹⁰⁷⁹

This primacy of the assurance of the “I think” is what, in the last analysis, saves the possibility of freedom and responsibility. But the main trait to retain is that in 1950, Ricœur seems to accept part of the accuracy of Freud’s depiction (there are indeed unconscious conflicts, understood as conflicts of forces) but he ultimately rejects the determinism of the causal model and, furthermore, does not seem to capture the fertility of what he later would call the dialectic of energetic and hermeneutics in Freudian psychoanalysis.

Finally, after all these phenomena of conflict, which seem to cut progressively deeper and deeper into the flesh of the subject, we are led back to Ricœur’s final conclusions concerning the overall role of negation in philosophy, and in human life.

3.2.6 – Saying yes to a world that says no

Coming back to the previous discussion of the relation between confusion of values and motives and the effort to overcome it through habit and choice, we can note that Ricœur assumes a Spinozist depiction of freedom of choice (*omnis*

¹⁰⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 398.

¹⁰⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 399.

¹⁰⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 403.

determinatio est negatio):

to choose means to exclude, man assumes appearance and form in a series of amputations.
(...)

we cannot break a form except in the name of another form and there is a greater danger than the one of being limited – the danger of not being at all: there is no being without choice, no choice without willing, no willing without ability, no ability without a particular being. We have to go back to the Cave. At least this negative moment is an essential moment of freedom.¹⁰⁸⁰

Shortly after this passage, Ricœur invokes Hegel's famous "labor of the negative", which shapes consciousness. Nonetheless, he also states that effort is based on desire and that it only says no, on condition of (also) saying yes¹⁰⁸¹ because "joy is the emotion which I can no longer oppose, which the 'work of the negative' cannot broach".¹⁰⁸² He also states that the sources of negation are so complex that it is "dangerous" to try to embrace them systematically.¹⁰⁸³ And he clearly assumes that "philosophy for us is a meditation of the yes, and not a surly identification of the no."¹⁰⁸⁴

As is easy to discern, Ricœur has a dialectic perspective on the development of human life in the world. For him, both what can metaphorically be designated as the "positive" and the "negative" in human life are always present. There is sadness and suffering, but there is also joy. There is death and finitude, but also life and allegedly the possibility to entertain a relation with Transcendence. As Alison Scott-Baumann has forcefully argued, the emphasis on negation in its many aspects is a major – if incomplete – project on Ricoeurian philosophy. But if negation and conflict are omnipresent, Ricœur's conviction – and this is really a conviction, not something that can be logically demonstrated – is that the positive trumps the negative, that we must say yes in spite of the overwhelming presence of the no; this conviction would find a remarkably poetic expression in *Fallible Man*, and is given its theoretical support in the already mentioned article on "negativity and primary affirmation". And this is the reason

¹⁰⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 316.

¹⁰⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 317

¹⁰⁸² *Ibid.* [Modified translation]

¹⁰⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹⁰⁸⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

why, according to Ricœur, we must consent to necessity.

Ultimately, the great conflict that is here at stake is obviously the one between the voluntary and the involuntary, between freedom and nature. And Ricœur does not wish to hide it. He assumes that the relation between these two overarching elements in us is paradoxical, but his conviction is that this conflict entails a conciliation, that the paradox is mysteriously reconciled. He reaffirms this in part three of *Freedom and Nature*¹⁰⁸⁵; he states that the “yes of consent is always won from the no” but also that “it is the essence of consent to be always on the way and of conciliation to be incomplete”¹⁰⁸⁶, which means that consent is also an effort, and that, in last analysis, it can never be taken for granted. The conclusion to be drawn from this is that consent, in the way Ricœur presents it, is also somewhat normative: it is an existential attitude that he is proposing, more than a factual description.

This attitude has more to do with our attitude towards life than with anything else. After delving into the depths of consciousness, Ricœur proposes to tackle life itself, to discern the significance of the pure fact of being alive. Life is obviously the *sine qua non* of willing and consciousness; after going through the level of the biological explanation, he argues for the consent of our personal character. This, in turn, entails the consenting of the mere fact of having been born, in spite of the “sorrow of finitude”¹⁰⁸⁷ and the omnipresence of human suffering. Ricœur describes this path as “the asymptotic progress of freedom towards necessity”.¹⁰⁸⁸

The last pages of *Freedom and Nature* are a forceful argumentation that shows the alleged need of going from refusal to consent. Ricœur follows a path of different forms of consent, from “stoicism or imperfect consent” to “orphism or hyperbolic consent”; in fact, these are existential possibilities he is depicting, ways of positioning oneself towards life, death, and the meaning of life. In these last chapters, he undertakes a somewhat virulent refutation of Sartre and the “dark existentialism”, affirming that we must have the courage of existing amid the absurd, and of facing it, owning up to it. Ultimately, Ricœur thinks that we have to make the final decisions concerning freedom and necessity in the context of our

¹⁰⁸⁵ See the whole kernel of the problem on pages 353-354: “the philosophical difficulty”.

¹⁰⁸⁶ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature*, p. 354.

¹⁰⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹⁰⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 346.

relation to Transcendence. He hints at the conciliation that a poetics of freedom would bring, but that only the idealized third volume we have already mentioned would develop in detail.

The conclusion of the book argues for a purely human conception of freedom. As Ricœur claims: “Freedom is not a pure act, it is, in each of its moments, activity and receptivity. It constitutes itself in receiving what it does not produce: values, capacities, and sheer nature”.¹⁰⁸⁹ Ultimately, freedom is only human because it is freedom; not Transcendence. And, as Pamela S. Anderson has emphasized, the will and other fundamental concepts in *Freedom and Nature* ultimately have the double status of being both Husserlian ideal essences and Kantian regulative ideas: “The limiting concepts of human willing have two interpretations: they are the regulative ideas of human freedom imagined as not being subject to any natural motivation, incarnate and contingent; and they are the ideal essences of freedom as perfectly enlightened, gracious, and creative.”¹⁰⁹⁰

Choosing will always remain a risk. The last sentence of *Freedom and Nature* states that “To will is not to create”¹⁰⁹¹ which is a reaffirmation of the limits of freedom and, once again, a refutation of the Sartrean concept of freedom, largely anchored in a Spinozist attitude of joy and affirmation, framed by a phenomenological and Kantian framework of finitude and rejection of totality. However, as I have claimed before, consent remains an existential attitude. One that, in last the analyzis, will be no more than... Ricœur’s own solution. I have serious reservations about the need for such a solution, and I think that it certainly conflicts with the later Ricoeurian anthropology and its emphasis on human capabilities. But I will leave a critical examination of this problem for part six of this dissertation. In the next chapter, we will see the first form that Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology assumes.

¹⁰⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 484.

¹⁰⁹⁰ Pamela S. Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant*, p. 46.

¹⁰⁹¹ Ricœur, *Freedom and Nature.*, p. 486.

3.3 – The Conflict Between Finite and Infinite

The second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will* was published ten years after *Freedom and Nature*, in 1960. It contains two different parts, a first book, *Fallible Man*¹⁰⁹², presents Ricœur's philosophical anthropology, and a second book, *The Symbolism of Evil*, initiates the hermeneutic turn in his philosophy, by looking for the indirect expressions of evil that we can find in particular myths. This chapter will delve into the conflicts made apparent by *Fallible Man*. In a way, no other Ricœur book goes as deep in its analysis of conflict's ontological significance for human being. Nonetheless, maybe we can say without fear of losing all objectivity, that it is also true that in no other book does Ricœur offer such a beautiful, almost poetic answer, to that omnipresence of negativity in human life.

Some of the best interpreters of Paul Ricœur's work, such as Jean Greisch,¹⁰⁹³ Gaëlle Fiasse¹⁰⁹⁴ and Domenico Jervolino¹⁰⁹⁵ have seen in Ricœur's philosophical anthropology, and mainly in the connection that can be established between the "fallible human being" of the 1960s and the "capable human being" of the 1990s – no matter if the interpretation is more continuist or discontinuist – the main unity of his work.

On the other hand, other interpreters such as Pamela S. Anderson and Fernanda Henriques have argued that the single, most crucial influence for Ricœur is Kant's Critical Philosophy, and that his framework is to a large extent Post-Kantian. I tend to agree, up to some extent, with this depiction, even though I also emphasize the Hegelian and Hermeneutic aspects playing a decisive role in his philosophy. Anderson forcefully argues that "Ricœur's seminal project on the will reveals a crucial debt to Kant; and a post-Kantian account of a dual aspect subject remains at the core of all his thinking. This means that, according to Ricœur's account of human willing, the subject is not merely passive in receiving the intuitions of experience but is actively involved in the constitution of objective

¹⁰⁹² Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, translated by Charles Kelbley (New York: Fordham University Press, 1986).

¹⁰⁹³ Jean Greisch, *Fehlbarkeit und Fähigkeit. Die philosophische Anthropologie Paul Ricoeurs* (Berlin: LIT Verlag, 2009).

¹⁰⁹⁴ Gaëlle Fiasse (ed.), *De l'homme faillible à l'homme capable* (Paris: P.U.F., 2008).

¹⁰⁹⁵ Domenico Jervolino, "The Unity of Paul Ricœur's work: l'homme capable" in *Between Suspicion and Sympathy*, *op. cit.*, pp. 1-10.

experience and in the self-recognition of human freedom as a captive free will.”¹⁰⁹⁶ This description is exact, but in no other place is it so clear as precisely in *Fallible Man* and *The Symbolism of Evil*.

Ricœur admits that *Fallible Man* was written as a sort of introduction to the *Symbolism of Evil*, it was to be an attempt to provide a transcendental grounding for the hermeneutic turn initiated in that second book, and which would radically change his philosophy. *Fallible Man* is dedicated to the concept of *fallibility*, defined as “a certain non-coincidence of man with himself”.¹⁰⁹⁷ Human being’s propensity to fail, to err (*faillir*) is, in turn, grounded in an inner *fragility*. This fragility and this disproportion are not only empirical and psychological but really ontological, for human being “is the only reality that presents this unstable ontological constitution of being greater and lesser than himself.”¹⁰⁹⁸

Ricœur’s working hypothesis is that these ontological characteristics are wholly accessible to pure reflection. Therefore, he develops his style of reflexive philosophy, in the sense we have seen above, to try to capture the essence of these phenomena. Nevertheless, and differently from what he had done in *Freedom and Nature*, he does not undertake phenomenological analyzes. The noetic-noematic analyzes of the structures of the voluntary and the involuntary having been accomplished ten years before, he will now try to ground what he calls the “pathétique of misery” in pure reflection. This last assertion means – and this is decisive for Ricoeurian philosophy – that reflection does not spring from itself and start anew. Rather, it is anchored in a certain precomprehension – we can say it, a *hermeneutic* precomprehension – of the totality in which human being is. The “pathétique of misery” is therefore the precomprehension of a being who understands him or herself as being “miserable”, that is, broken, split, torn apart between two poles: in other words, conflict is now ontological.

This reflective philosophy is transcendental in that, in the good Kantian tradition, it does not start from the subject but rather from the object before him or herself and from that traces back the analysis to the conditions of possibility of that object. However, since it is not the object that reveals our inner disproportion, the task of reflection will be to progressively integrate the precomprehension of

¹⁰⁹⁶ Pamela S. Anderson, *Ricœur and Kant*, p. x.

¹⁰⁹⁷ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 1.

¹⁰⁹⁸ *Ibid.*

the pathétique of misery into transcendental philosophy. Ultimately, this step-by-step enlargement of philosophical reflection will not be able to incorporate all that stems from its *other*. There will always be a *rest*, a *residue*, which philosophy will not be capable of grasping directly, conceptually. And that would lead Ricœur to try a different hermeneutic style.

We have seen before how Ricoeurian philosophy oscillates between a description of the many conflicts that permeate everything and the postulation of the possibility of reconciling these conflicts. Well, in *Fallible Man* this possibility attains a very specific ontological feature: human being is depicted as being the *intermediary*, the *mediator* between the two poles between which he or she is torn. And this both at a theoretical, a practical and an affective level. The depiction of human being as miserable, because torn apart between two different realms or orders, has a respectable tradition in philosophy, and Ricœur mentions Plato and Pascal. In Plato we are a *mélange*, the offspring of *Poros* and *Penia*, an intermediary between the empirical realm and the realm of ideas. We have also seen, in part one of this thesis, Plato's descriptions of inner conflict, with the metaphor of the white horse and the black horse. In Pascal we are suspended between two infinities, a mean between everything and nothing.

Ultimately, the main conflict which is here at stake, the main rift, is that between the poles of finitude and infinitude. How can it be that human being is finite, and yet formulates a precomprehension of totality and tends towards infinitude? Is this an illusion, or a problem of perspective? Let us follow the lead of the three main forms this conflict assumes in *Fallible Man*.

3.3.1 – The transcendental conflict: finite perspective and infinite verb

Each of the three main parts of *Fallible Man* has a well-drawn conflict between two poles: one representing finitude, the other infinitude. Each of them is mediated by a different function pertaining to human being. Thus in chapter two¹⁰⁹⁹ the conflict is between finite perspective and infinite verb, mediated by the transcendental pure imagination.

This chapter deals with theoretical philosophy, in the Kantian sense. It

¹⁰⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 17-46.

investigates human being's power of knowing and its modes; this is the reason why it deserves to be called "transcendental". Ricœur accepts, for the most part, the Kantian depiction of our faculties as being a mixture between spontaneity and passivity. We have a finite understanding that does not create its objects; instead, it receives them through sensibility. And in here he is particularly interested in the role of imagination that is, in Kant, precisely the mediating faculty between the two domains of sensibility and understanding.

Ricœur firstly remarks that "I am first directed toward the world".¹¹⁰⁰ I have a perspective towards the world, and what I first see is the world itself (and not myself): I see objects, other human beings, and so on. My body opens up the world to me; through my body, I perceive the world. Nevertheless, this opening is not unrestricted; rather, it is limited and qualified; this is what "perspective" or "point of view" actually means:

In what does the finitude of receiving consist? It consists in the perspectival limitation of perception. It causes every view of... to be a *point of view* on... But this characteristic of the point of view, inherent in every viewing, is not directly noticed by me but realized reflectively. Thus it is *on* an aspect of the appearance, taken as an intentional correlate of receiving, that I must catch sight of the finitude of *my* point of view. This aspect of the appearance, which refers me back to my point of view, is the perceived object's insurmountable and invincible property of presenting itself from a certain angle, unilaterally. I never perceive more than the presumed unity of the flux of these silhouettes. Thus it is upon the object that I apprehend the perspectival nature of perception, which consists in the very inadequacy of the percept, that is, in the fundamental property that the sense outlined may always be *canceled* or *confirmed*, that it may reveal itself as *other* than the one I first presumed. The intentional analysis of this inadequacy makes me turn back from the object to myself as a finite center of perspective.¹¹⁰¹

This rather long passage shows us that Ricœur is undertaking a phenomenological analysis of the intentionality of consciousness and inscribing it within the Kantian framework. The fact that the noematic object presents itself in silhouettes and profiles, unilaterally, means that it must be me to synthesize it, to

¹¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 19.

¹¹⁰¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 20-21.

grasp its meaning in the abovementioned flux of the silhouettes. Now, Ricœur's remark that "the sense outlined may always be *canceled* or *confirmed*," that it may reveal itself as being other than anticipated, is very important. At stake is here not only a description of knowing and perception; actually, if we extrapolate this to an epistemology of interpretation, a very important clue on Ricoeurian hermeneutics might be provided. Direct perception is not the only way in which knowledge is attained. Anticipating something I will discuss in more detail in part four, let me mention that an interpretation – for instance, one stemming from the reading of a text – also provides meaning and is incorporated into subjective knowledge. The passage above reveals us Ricœur's stance on perceptive perspectivism but it also might indicate how his *interpretive perspectivism* takes place: every interpretation of a phenomenon (be it a concept, a text, or ourselves) can be considered as being a unilateral profile or, at best, to continue using this analogy, a provisional unity of the presumed flux of silhouettes of the phenomenon at stake. As such, this unity might be canceled or confirmed. Except that the process of verification is not as straightforward as in perception; rather, it is probably tied to processes of subjective probability. But in order to better understand that phenomenon itself, whatever it may be, there will be a need to *enlarge* the perspective, to push through with the process of interpretation, such as in perception, every new profile will give a more complete representation of the noematic object. In the next chapter I will explicate fully this connection between perceptive perspectivism and the perspectivism of interpretation, which is a feature shared by the philosophies of both Ricœur and Gadamer. It is noteworthy, that the characteristic of enlargement, of a perspective being able to go beyond itself, is presented in this chapter of *Fallible Man* we are now summing up. Let us see how.

The solution to the problem of the finitude of perspective will be sought after by Ricœur in the event of meaning. For him, the very fact that we can talk about our finitude (and thus that we take notice of it, that we are conscious of the fact of finitude) means, *eo ipso* that we can and do in fact go beyond it, albeit in a very peculiar form (not, of course, in the mode of Hegel). Indeed, if my body and my situated perspective is the "here" in which my finite openness to the world takes place, the fact that I can speak about myself as being finite presupposes the dedoubling of my own perspective: *I* have a perspective on *myself*.

Thus, according to Ricœur, "This means that every description of finitude

is abstract, i.e., separate and incomplete, if it neglects to account for the transgression that makes discourse on finitude possible. The complete discourse on finitude is a discourse on the finitude and the infinitude of man.”¹¹⁰² As we can see, at this point in his philosophy, it is meaning (as it expresses itself in language and discourse) that throws us towards the pole of infinitude, and that grasps a certain sense of totality. However, as we can easily guess from what we have seen in part one, this totality is only a limit idea, within the strict delimitation provided by the Kantian framework. Never can it be transformed into a *Übersicht*, a non-situated, total and systematic view.¹¹⁰³ The verb, and the act of saying are thus what point us towards Transcendence; there is a “transcendence of the saying”¹¹⁰⁴:

This transgression is the intention to signify. (...) If I now note that to signify is to intend, the transgression of the point of view is nothing else than speech as the possibility of expressing, and of expressing the point of view itself. Therefore, I am not merely a situated onlooker, but a being who intends and expresses as an intentional transgression of the intention. (...) The mute look is caught up in speech that articulates the sense of it. And this ability to express sense is a continual transcendence, at least in intention, of the perspectival aspect of the perceived here and now.¹¹⁰⁵

There is therefore a double movement, one that binds me to my finitude, and another that tends to detach me and point towards the totality of meaning. In 1960, Ricœur tends to consider that language and meaning are the domains of the universal and, therefore, by being immersed in language, I go beyond myself. Curiously, in this phase, a certain linguistic idealism might be detected.

This is the moment when imagination makes its appearance. Synthesis comes into play, firstly, in things themselves: they are a synthesis of meaning and presence.¹¹⁰⁶ However, if Ricœur is to find a synthesis in the subject himself, in the context of a Post-Kantian framework, he will have to develop a schematism that allows him to describe the function of knowing itself. It must be said that at this level, Ricœur is more following Kant than providing a tenable theoretical alternative. Pure, a priori imagination, will provide representations to concepts and

¹¹⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

¹¹⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 26.

¹¹⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 28.

¹¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

¹¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 38.

vice-versa, thereby forming the objects which we can claim to legitimately know. In this sense, the transcendental conflict, and its solution, remain purely formal: they explain the double movement inside one's act of knowing, and they show how there is an intermediary function that renders knowledge possible, in spite of its double force. That said, Ricœur remains convinced that formality is no objection:

the synthesis it brings about between understanding and sensibility (or in our terminology, between meaning and appearance, between speaking and looking) is *consciousness* but it is not *self-consciousness*. (...)

It would be a mistake to conclude from this reflection that a philosophy of a transcendental style is empty because it is only formal. It is the first stage of a philosophical anthropology. Whoever would want to commit it to the flames and start right off with a philosophy of the person would leave the *pathétique* only to fall into a fanciful ontology of being and nothingness.¹¹⁰⁷

It is easy to detect, in the background, the continuation of Ricœur's polemic against Sartre. He contends that the first, exterior synthesis (that of the object) is instrumental to ground human being's position as *intermediary*, as a mean between being and nothing.

3.3.2 – The practical conflict

The first chapter of *Fallible Man* was able to explain the act of knowing in a transcendental manner. It showed us the constitution of consciousness, but not of self-consciousness. In the second chapter Ricœur positions himself in the practical domain, and reshapes some of the analyzes he had undertaken in *Freedom and Nature*. A strictly transcendental method is not able, according to him, to reintegrate in reflection the concern for totality (understood, as stated above, as a limiting idea, that is: a task). In chapter three¹¹⁰⁸ he is therefore trying to grasp the significance of the “overflow” of meaning [*le trop plein*], the practical significance of the pole of infinitude in my life. Hence we go from the “I see, I

¹¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹¹⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 47-79.

have consciousness of” to the “I desire, I want, I can”. In this chapter, the conflict unfolds between *character* and *happiness*, being mediated and synthesized by the feeling of *respect*, which constitutes the notion of *person*.

The “character”, my character – which had already been examined in *Freedom and Nature* is the equivalent, in the practical domain, of perspective: it is *this* specific character that mediates my access to the world and to other people, with my particular desires, ideals, etc.: “character is the finite openness of my existence taken as a whole”¹¹⁰⁹ or “*the limited openness of our field of motivation taken as a whole*”.¹¹¹⁰ We can say that our field of motivation is open to all values of all men in all cultures; if “nothing of human is foreign to me”, all the different values appear before me as possibilities, in what Ricœur calls the “whole soul”. However, *what* I choose and *the way* in which I choose are something personal. This is, once again, Ricœur’s perspectivism, at the practical level. However, its enlargement is not an easy process. If I can change my position and try to grasp a new perspective – and this is also valid, in my opinion, when applied to the conflict of interpretations – I cannot as easily change my character.

Happiness, on the other hand, is the “total aim of all the facets of transgression”.¹¹¹¹ In here, we are recalled, with Aristotle and the teleological tradition, that every action, pursuit, inquiry or art aims at some good. In this tradition, happiness is indeed the *ergon* of mankind, the formal task to accomplish, no matter the content attributed to it. In *Oneself as Another*, this is what determines the primacy of ethics over morality.

Even in Kantianism, the idea of totality plays a very specific role. In fact, as we might recall from part one of this thesis, reason is the search for the unconditioned, and thus, strives for totality. And this plays a practical role: “The idea of totality, therefore, is not merely a rule for theoretical thought. It dwells in the human will and in this way becomes the source of the most extreme “disproportion”: that which preys on human *action* and strains it between the finitude of character and the infinitude of happiness.”¹¹¹² Furthermore, what is peculiar to this idea of happiness, expressed as a totality, is that as such the actualization of happiness is really never fully given. In fact, and this can be taken

¹¹⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹¹¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 60.

¹¹¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 64.

¹¹¹² *Ibid.*, p. 67.

as another expression of Ricoeurian hermeneutics, all that can be discerned in our experience are *signs* which tell us whether or not we are moving in the *right direction*:

happiness is not given in any experience; it is only adumbrated in a consciousness of direction. No act gives happiness, but the encounters of our life that are most worthy of being called “events” indicate the direction of happiness. (...) The events that bespeak happiness are those which remove obstacles and uncover a vast landscape of existence. The excess of meaning, the overflow, the immense: that is the sign that we are “directed toward” happiness.¹¹¹³

It is therefore reason that *demand*s totality, but it is the *feeling* of happiness that attests that I am (or am not) in the right direction.

Consequently, between the limited access of my particular character, and the explosion towards the infinitude of totality provoked by my desire for happiness, where am I? I am, as always, in the middle. It is at this point that Ricoeur’s reflective philosophy, in the abovementioned sense, becomes patent:

Can there be a synthesis of happiness and character? Most assuredly, and that synthesis is found in the person. The person is the *Self* that was lacking to the “I” of the Kantian “I think”, to consciousness in general, the correlate of the synthesis of the object.¹¹¹⁴

Thus, for the first time, Ricoeur explicitly addresses the problematic of the *self* as such. We are still far from *Oneself as Another*. However, the “detour” is already in place: there is no experience of the person in itself and for itself.

According to Ricoeur, the “person” is, firstly, a “project”: the project of *humanity*, that is, the qualitative characteristic that makes us humans as such.¹¹¹⁵ Consequently, it is an “end of my action” that also constitutes “an existence”¹¹¹⁶; we might recall that in the context of Kantian practical philosophy, persons are precisely “ends-in-themselves” and that they must, therefore, be *respected*.

Respect is, in Kant, the a priori feeling, the way in which reason affects

¹¹¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹¹¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 69.

¹¹¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹¹¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

sensibility and commands that we respect the law of duty. However, what is interesting to note is that even if Ricœur chooses respect for his practical synthesis, he does not cease to emphasize that this synthesis itself bears the indelible mark of fragility:

The paradoxical constitution of “respect”, like that of the transcendental imagination, is such that this feeling upon which the practical synthesis rests cannot be reflected without being destroyed. In respect I am obeying subject *and* a commanding sovereign; but I cannot imagine this situation otherwise than as a twofold mode of *belonging* (...) Into this twofold belonging is written the possibility of a discord and what is, as it were, the existential “fault” that causes man’s fragility.¹¹¹⁷

As would become patent in the *Symbolism of Evil*, this is evil that Ricœur is talking about, and in order to investigate it, he undertakes a properly hermeneutic method. In the context of *Fallible Man*, the important aspect to highlight is that one of the meanings of fallibility is thus revealed: to fail is also the possibility to choose evil, to embrace an evil maxim. For Ricœur, as for Kant, evil might be radical, but it is not primordial. Therefore, even though we might appear as guilty (let us recall that *faute* also means guilt), it might as well be that human being is primordially *innocent*.

Therefore, if human being is always already divided, torn, and if this rift expresses itself in the multiple conflicts whose lead we have been following up until now, Ricœur will want to find its origin, undertake an “exploration of the primordial”¹¹¹⁸ and to find a principle of limitation which is different from primordial evil. This he will find in the *thumos*, (the heart, or feeling). It is therefore at the affective level that the next conflict will unfold.

3.3.3 – The affective conflict

Having arrived at this stage of our course, when we are near the last stop of “existential conflict”, it might seem as if there is a repetition of certain topics, and that what Ricœur is doing is just describing in different words the same

¹¹¹⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 74-75.

¹¹¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

phenomena. This is true, to some extent, and it might be also a consequence of his “latent hermeneutics”. When dealing with affective conflict, and the mediating function of *thumos*, Ricœur does not directly call it existential conflict but, in a way, what he is doing is letting existential conflict reach its peak. Augustine, addressing God, described Him as being *interior intimo meo superior et summo meo*¹¹¹⁹, that is, my superior to the highest point, and more inward than my inner self. Maybe we could say, *mutatis mutandis*, that in *Fallible Man* and namely in this chapter, conflict will reveal itself as indeed being more inward than my inner self, as constituting my inner self, which is forced to mediate between the two margins of this rift.

In chapter 4¹¹²⁰ of *Fallible Man*, “The Affective Fragility” what is at stake is the conflict between *bios* and *logos*, between *pleasure* and *happiness* as it is existentially felt. Furthermore, this chapter also deals with the constitution of self and others amid the intersubjective relationships of recognition, in a first, yet at this point critical, approach. Ultimately, in his conclusion¹¹²¹ Ricœur draws a moral consequence from this anthropological description, which is that the possibility to fail, to err, is the possibility to tend towards evil: “the concept of fallibility includes the possibility of evil in a still more positive sense: man’s disproportion is a *power* to fail, in the sense that it makes man *capable* of failing”.¹¹²² Within the framework of his Post-Kantian philosophy, Ricœur would ultimately use and redefine the content of the Kantian categories of modality to identify limitation with fragility. Fragility will be the result of the conflict between originary affirmation and existential difference. This affective conflict, as existential conflict, is thus the defining trait of ourselves, as human beings. Let us see exactly how it unfolds in this last chapter and the conclusion of *Fallible Man*.

At the outset, Ricœur affirms that feeling, affectivity, is itself doubled, divided by a double polarity (thus the echo of Maine de Biran’s: “Homo simplex in vitalitate, duplex in humanitate”). Therefore, any anthropological investigation that wishes to complement the faculty of knowing and acting with the faculty of feeling, must start from this polarity – “Our whole previous reflection bids us to

¹¹¹⁹ The full quote is “tu autem eras interior intimo meo et superior summo meo”. See Augustine, *Confessions*, translated by William Watts, (London: Loeb, 1912), book III, 6, §11, p. 120 [translation modified].

¹¹²⁰ Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, pp. 81-132.

¹¹²¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 133-146.

¹¹²² *Ibid.*, p. 145.

start not with the simple, but with the dual”, says Ricœur in page 92 –, in order to later understand the specificity of man as mediator between this dual aspect of his existence. Our humanity is thus made by the heart, which is placed between these two demands. And one of the ways in which this polarity expresses itself is in the tension between pleasure and happiness:

It can be shown, in fact, that there are two kinds of *terminations* of affective movements: one of them completes and perfects isolated, partial, finite acts or processes. This is pleasure. It falls to the other one to be the perfection of the total work of man; this would be the termination of a destiny, of a destination or an existential project. This would be happiness, no longer the empty idea of happiness that up to now we have opposed to character, but the fullness of happiness or beatitude. (...) For this duality of “ends” animates and rules the duality of “movements” and “appetites” and internally divides human desire.¹¹²³

Let me emphasize, from what is attested above, that it is methodologically very important that Ricœur chooses to start his analysis from the dual, from polarity. This means – and that much can be latently assumed when he invokes, in the following page, the maxim *primum vivere, deinde philosophari* (live first, philosophize afterwards) – that if philosophy is to come back to the lived situation and shed light upon it, it must admit that what is *felt*, what is *lived* is the polarity. In this case, I desire two things, pleasure and happiness, and they are, more often than not, conflicting. The epistemological consequence is that conflict is, for Ricœur, the first felt experience. Ontologically, this would make conflict first *quoad nos*, for us, even though not necessarily *quoad se*, in itself. Thus it will increasingly become apparent how, following this lead – and even though this is my claim, I am only trying to make explicit what is an implicit movement in Ricoeurian philosophy – Ricœur will first and foremost detect conflicts, namely in his hermeneutical method, and then proceed to construct his philosophy from those, trying to provide solutions for them.

Ricœur proceeds to emphasize how the *thumos*, the feeling felt by the heart, will proceed to internalize that duality and transform it into a drama (a move akin to that made in *Freedom and Nature*); more importantly, he seems to derive

¹¹²³ *Ibid.*, p. 93.

the genesis of the self from this intermediary position of the *thumos*:

We may place the whole median region of the affective life under the sway of this ambiguous and fragile *thumos*, the whole region situated between the vital and spiritual affections, or, in other words, all the affectivity that makes up the transition between living and thinking, between *bios* and *logos*. It should be noted that it is in this intermediate region that the *self* is constituted as different from natural beings and other selves (...) Only with *thumos* does desire assume the characters of otherness and subjectivity that constitute a Self. In this sense the Self is a “between-two”, a transition.¹¹²⁴

Thumos is thus the specifically human feeling, even more so than the types of desire that are designated by *epithumia* or *eros*. Ricœur proceeds to analyze the several relations that we can assume with others in society, under the banner of having, power and worth.

I think that there is an implicit critique of egoism (in its many forms, be it psychological egoism or logical egoism, as we would say in contemporary terms) in all of Ricœur’s writings that deal with moral or existential issues. Thus he deploys a critique of the relationships based on mere having (like Marcel had done before him) and also examines the perverse forms of *power-over*, that is, the phenomena of domination in society. However, the most interesting part to delve into, in my opinion, are the few pages in which he scrutinizes the relationships based on “worth” (*valoir*), because this is where he undertakes a rather severe analysis of what we call recognition.

We have seen in the first and second parts of this thesis how both Hegel and Honneth developed social theories anchored in recognition and how they both developed tripartite models with different spheres of recognition. In 1960, Ricœur scrutinizes a form of the process of recognition but choosing to accentuate its fragile character and the possibility of its pathological perversion. As such, we can consider that this take on recognition is the negative side of the positive evaluations of recognition that are undertaken by Hegel, Honneth and Ricœur himself (in 2004). However, the objection that he would formulate to the neo-Hegelian model of recognition in 2004 is, more or less, grounded in this negative

¹¹²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 107.

take on recognition from 1960. In a nutshell, Ricœur loosely identifies the request for esteem with the request for honor and the dependence on the opinion of the other(s). He shows that this dependence on the opinion of others reveals a fundamental fragility of one's own self, in line with the main depiction of fragility outlined throughout *Fallible Man*. This is a curious aspect because, if already in *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur had sketched a description of intersubjectivity and the dependency of the self towards it, *Fallible Man* seems to be a step back in the direction of a self that should be more independent, not relying too much on the opinion (or the gaze) of the other. I will allow myself to quote some rather long passages, so that we can fully appreciate the extent, and even the virulence, of Ricœur's critique:

But the fragility of this existence as recognized is that the "esteem" that establishes it is merely "opinion", that *timé* is *doxa*. Here there is a threat of existing in a quasi-phantasmal manner, of being a reflection. The possibility of being no more than the word of another, the dependence on fragile opinion – these are precisely the occasion of the passions of glory that graft their vanity onto the fragility of esteem as opinion.¹¹²⁵

Because it is believed, the worth of the self may be sham, feigned, or alleged; it may also be neglected, contested, disputed, as well as scorned, belittled, choked back, and humiliated. And when, rightly or wrongly, it is neglected, the lack of esteem may be offset by a self-overestimation or by a depreciation of others and their values: in this case aggressiveness, reprisals, resentment, and revenge are the defiant measures used against non-recognition, which itself can be understood only through the search for recognition. (...)

The possibility of a pathology of esteem is thus inherent in the very nature of esteem as opinion. Nothing is more fragile, nothing is easier to wound than an existence that is at the mercy of a belief; and one can understand how the "feeling of inferiority" could serve as a clue to the genesis of neuroses.¹¹²⁶

the desire of desire has no end (...) Thus human action regenerates and nourishes itself of itself, drawn forward by its insatiable quests.¹¹²⁷

¹¹²⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹¹²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 124-125.

¹¹²⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 127.

These several different passages contain different claims and objections. The third is the one that Ricœur would ultimately retain in his late philosophical anthropology: the desire of recognition (or the desire of desire) can fall into a logic of bad infinity whereby it runs the risk of becoming unhappy consciousness. This is what would later drive him to propose a different paradigm, that of mutuality and the states of peace.

The second quote shows Ricœur's perspicacity in understanding the social dynamics of the quest for recognition and the potential devastating effects of misrecognition, even though this was not his subject-matter at the time. Furthermore, it continues his "dialectic of the diagnostic" and even hints at the possibility of turning it into a diagnosis of social pathologies, in the sense given by it by Critical Theory, in that a society that breeds pathologies of esteem might be a society which deserves to be criticized. However, Ricœur chooses to emphasize the fragility of the reliance on opinion. In fact, he does not want to take the pathological as the constitutive, but he points towards the dangers of fragility. For instance, self-overestimation is not constitutive; but fragility is constitutive and Ricœur seems to be saying that all too often the response to fragility might be pathological. Let us try to discern this appreciation in fuller detail.

As we can see in the first passage, there is a conflation between esteem and glory; the main charge that Ricœur seems to be addressing to recognition at this point in time is that the request for esteem can easily turn into vanity; this is somewhat resonant with the critique of the *vanitas vanitatum, et omnia vanitas* of the Ecclesiastes. There is thus a slippery slope that leads from "I want to be granted value" to "I want to be recognized as superior". Ricœur is not taking into consideration, something which he would later do in 1990, the importance of self-esteem, co-dependent on the esteem of others, for the aim of the good life in general. However, there is another conflation at work here: that between a singular characteristic (that I wish to be recognized as such) and a universal trait that identifies me as a member of the human race:

It seems to me that we can say two things: Esteem involves a kind of objectivity, quite formal, it is true, which we can back up with a reflection of a Kantian style. The *quid* of esteem, *what* I esteem in others and for which I expect confirmation from others in myself, is what may be called our existence-worth, our existing worth. (...) Thus esteem

indeed involves a representation, the representation of an end that is not merely an “end to be realized” but an “end existing by itself”

(...) Kant gives the name of humanity to this objectivity. The proper object of esteem is the idea of man in my person and in the person of another.

I expect another person to convey the image of my humanity to me, to esteem me by making my humanity known to me. This fragile reflection of myself in another’s opinion has the consistency of an object; it conceals the objectivity of an existing end that draws a limit to any pretension to make use of me. It is in and through this objectivity that I can be recognized.¹¹²⁸

As we can see, the second conflation entails two types of categorization that will later be discerned differently. On the one hand, this judgment bears a mixture between recognition as identification, recognition of oneself and recognition by others: it is the other who recognizes me, and he does so by identifying an alleged objective trait that identifies me as being human. On the other hand, the esteem – which, for Honneth, (whose analyzes Ricœur for the most part accepts in *The Course of Recognition*) is tied to the recognition of difference, not the recognition of a universal trait – required is supposed to be the esteem of a universal trait, the same for everyone and that precisely identifies me as being human. Now, this is closer to what Kant, Honneth and the later Ricœur (namely in *Oneself as Another*) see in the notion of self-respect. Self-respect is tied to the recognition of rights and to our common humanity. The consequence of these several conflations is that the negative aspect of recognition emphasized in *Fallible Man* might be due to an insufficient effort of categorization that Ricœur would only develop later, and with the help of other theoretical influences.

That said, Ricœur’s appreciation of recognition is not entirely negative at this point. In fact, he already hints at both the connection of recognition with identity theory and the making of one’s own self, and the reflective version of self-recognition (or self-attestation, or the several relations to self that are self-ascription, self-esteem, and self-respect) by saying that “I love myself as if what I loved were another” [*je m’aime comme un autre*]; and this without having discovered the brief saying of George Bernanos that he liked to repeat and that gave *Oneself as Another* its title.

¹¹²⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 122-123.

If humanity is what I esteem in another and in myself, I esteem myself as a thou for another. I esteem myself in the second person; in that case self-love, in its essential texture, is not distinct from sympathy, which means that reflective feelings do not differ from intentional feelings. I love myself as if what I loved were another; (...) I believe that I am worth something in the eyes of another who approves my existence; in the extreme case, this other is myself. Insofar as I am affected by it, this belief, this credence, this trust, constitutes the very feeling of my worth. This appreciative affection, or this affective appreciation, is the highest point to which self-consciousness can be raised in *thumos*.¹¹²⁹

This is not yet a hermeneutics of the self, as Ricœur would develop in the decade to follow. But it is already a theory of self-formation. This “trust” that “constitutes the feeling of my worth” would be, in 1990, attestation of the self. The only difference is that the emphasis is here not on the mediation through signs and the human sciences, but rather on affectivity, on the *thumos* as mediator between life and logos, pleasure and happiness, finite and infinite.

This discussion on recognition notwithstanding, I will say, to reiterate, that *Fallible Man* remains the peak of existential conflict. As Ricœur explicitly states: “*conflict* is a function of man’s most primordial constitution; the object is synthesis; the self is conflict.”¹¹³⁰ What seems interesting is that he tries to theoretically ground the whole book and actually his whole early anthropology in, let us say, an existential transformation of the Kantian categories of quality:

In passing from an axiomatics of physics to a philosophical anthropology, the triad of reality, negation, and limitation may be expressed in the following three terms: *originary affirmation*, *existential difference*, *human mediation*. Our study expresses the progression of this triad through knowing, acting and feeling. What is in play in this dialectic is a more and more concrete determination of the third term that truly represents man’s humanity.¹¹³¹

Ricœur reaffirms once again that for him, originary, or primary, affirmation is the

¹¹²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 124.

¹¹³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹¹³¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 135-136.

constitutive aspect of human being; however, he also states that in order for negation to become *human* (that is, in order for humanity to be constituted) the vital need of affirmation has to be transformed and combined with existential difference, thus forming the torn but mediating human. He claims that what has been lost in Hegel and Sartre, and their “victorious march of negation”¹¹³² is precisely the “true relation to the power of affirmation that constitutes us”.¹¹³³ This aspect is important to understand how, in the framework of Ricoeurian ontology, negation is related to conflict. Indeed, at least at an anthropological level, conflict is moved by negation. It is by being negated that primary affirmation becomes existential conflict, and it is this conflict, and its mediation and limitation, that constitutes us as humans as such. So negation is the hidden cause of conflict.

Ultimately, Ricœur remains Spinozist. Beyond Kantian formalism and theoretical framework (which provides Ricoeurian philosophy its limits) and also beyond (broken) Hegelian dialectic and its powerful capacity to provide thought with movement, he reasserts the power of the *conatus*. Heidegger often speaks about the forgetfulness of being. It seems as if Ricœur is drawing our attention to some sort of forgetfulness of our *conatus*, of our power of self-affirmation. Connecting this to feeling, and to the feeling of finitude (finitude which he never denied) he speaks about sadness, the sadness of the finite. And this because ultimately our fallibility also expresses itself in the frailty of life, our finite life. But Ricœur’s definitive depiction of this topic is also perhaps his most poetic and beautiful motto:

Man is the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite¹¹³⁴ [*L’homme c’est la Joie du Oui dans la tristesse du fini.*]

Human Being remains a conflict for him or herself. And the conciliation of conflict, of which Ricœur never loses sight, continues to be a difficult and incomplete task.¹¹³⁵ We live between two abysses. And the effort of our distension and our negotiation with them makes the reappearance of conflict inevitable. We

¹¹³² *Ibid.*, p. 137.

¹¹³³ *Ibid.*

¹¹³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 140.

¹¹³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 141.

are the “*becoming of an opposition*”.¹¹³⁶ Nevertheless, in spite of conflict, in spite of negation, in spite of suffering, we are also resilience and capacity to overcome obstacles. To affirm life and to aim at the good life.

In the *Symbolism of Evil* Ricœur undertakes an analysis of the several myths of evil, in order to explain how is it that evil comes about, in spite of our primordial innocence. His indirect hermeneutical style is therefore inaugurated. I will not delve in detail into that book, because conflict is not as important for it as it is in the works we have just scrutinized, nor in the following ones, namely *Freud and Philosophy* and *The Conflict of Interpretations*. But before entering into the hermeneutic conflict I want to introduce both the kernel of Ricœur’s method and its relation with the notion of truth, also to cover the main aspects of his intellectual development in the decade from 1950-1960. I will thus briefly mention *History and Truth*, his first collection of texts, reassembling for the most part texts of the Strasbourg period, written in between the two volumes of the *Philosophy of the Will*.

¹¹³⁶ *Ibid.*

3.4 – History, Method and Truth

Ricœur lived in Strasbourg from 1948 to 1956, a period in which he taught at the University of Strasbourg (replacing Jean Hyppolite), before moving to Paris and becoming a Professor at the Sorbonne. This period thus encompasses the last years before the defense of his thesis (which was ready by 1948) and his appearance in the French intellectual scene, as the translator of Husserl and an original phenomenologist in his own right. However, this period is also one of an active public engagement, namely in *Esprit*. As I said before, Ricœur was often attentive to the spirit of his own time, and discussed its main political events.

Parallel to the development of his *Philosophy of the Will*, whose transition from phenomenology and existential philosophy to a more anthropological and hermeneutic tone is thus bred in these years, the Strasbourg period saw the beginning of Ricœur's systematic interest in thinking history and its relationship with philosophy. Thinking (and contributing to the epistemology of) historiography would eventually become one of his lasting interests. It is during the Strasbourg period that Ricœur publishes a bunch of small texts that were to be republished in 1955 in *History and Truth* (later reprinted with additions in 1964) but his reflections on history would later change with the publication of *Time and Narrative* in the 1980s and of *Memory, History, Forgetting* in 2000.¹¹³⁷ In this thesis, I will not dedicate whole chapters to these later books, whose impact on historians has been considerable, originating important debates and that have been thoroughly analyzed elsewhere.¹¹³⁸

Furthermore, the Strasbourg years were a very important formative period

¹¹³⁷ Even though I am not dedicating whole chapters to Ricœur's theory of history in this already very long thesis, I must emphasize that conflict plays a role in them. This is more evident in *Memory, History, Forgetting* than elsewhere, where Ricœur dedicates whole pages to the topics of conflict between individual memory, collective memory and historical memory; he also takes into account the possibility of controversy between testimonies (the so-called conflict of memories) which happens when a testimony is contradicted or attacked by an hermeneutics of suspicion (see *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 164-166). Furthermore, he makes of dissensus one of the main presences in the book and, coming back to analyze Lyotard's *differend*, Ricœur chooses to emphasize the importance of *litigation*, a notion that had been played down by Lyotard in comparison with the *differend*. See *Memory, History, Forgetting*, pp. 314 ff.

¹¹³⁸ See "*Temps et Récit*" de Paul Ricœur en débat, edited by Christian Bouchindhomme and Rainer Rochlitz (Paris: Cerf, 1990), *La juste mémoire. Lectures autour de Paul Ricœur*, edited by Olivier Abel, Enrico Castelli-Gattinara, Sabina Loriga et Isabelle Ullern-Weit   (Gen  ve: Labor et Fides, 2006) and *Paul Ricœur: penser la m  moire*, edited by Fran  ois Dosse and Catherine Goldenstein (Paris: Seuil, 2013).

for Ricœur's thought. He often referred to these post-War years as the "the best he has ever known"¹¹³⁹ and we know that he made an effort to get acquainted with as many classical authors as possible. One year he tried to read the complete works of Plato, then Aristotle, Spinoza, and so on. Given the fact that some of his lectures are now being published by Le Seuil, and the first of these lectures, the *Cours sur Platon et Aristote*, from 1953-1954, is already available, I will briefly mention it, because of its importance to the making of Ricœur's famous "long route". Ricœur only read Gadamer in the 1960s, following Gadamer's publication of *Truth and Method*¹¹⁴⁰ at the beginning of that decade. I will scrutinize the two phases of Ricoeurian hermeneutics in the next part. However, it seems important to me, also to prepare the incursion in the hermeneutic conflict, to already show the differences between Gadamer's and Ricœur's respective takes on the relation between truth and method. This will also contribute to showing how for Ricœur, hermeneutics was probably the most encompassing method. Indeed, Ricœur did not resort to the phenomenological method in every one of his works. But we can argue that as soon as he became, let us say, hermeneutically self-aware, he never ceased to use the hermeneutical method and, by continuous processes of "deregionalization", to apply it to different domains. As such, it will be important to clarify it right now.

But let me first of all mention his particular conception of truth. His will be a hermeneutic truth, not fully logical and objective in a scientific sense, but which rather stems from a certain precomprehension and immersion in the world. I already mentioned his perspectivism. It is time to add that this particular sort of perspectivism is not akin to relativism; in fact, it is a hermeneutic perspectivism. And the interesting part is that this is already hinted at in *History and Truth*, even before the hermeneutic turn of his philosophy is consummated. In the last parts of this chapter, I will also strive to show, through a comparison with Gadamer and by drawing a brief history of the notion of perspectivism, how Ricœur's early take on perspectivism, demonstrated and upheld both in *History and Truth* and *Fallible Man*, gains in breadth and scope when it is hermeneutically grasped and refashioned through the conflict of interpretations.

¹¹³⁹ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction* p. 20.

¹¹⁴⁰ Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, translation revised by Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, second edition 2004).

3.4.1 – The history of philosophy and the unity of truth

In “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth”¹¹⁴¹, an article originally written in 1954 and republished in *History and Truth*, Ricœur states his intention to “do a history of philosophy without doing a philosophy of history”¹¹⁴², that is, to take an approach that simultaneously grasps the singular, original character of each philosophy *and* avoids falling back into full blown relativism, by grasping the relation of each of these philosophies and philosophers to the problem of truth itself. This leads to a questioning about the existence or inexistence of meaning in the historical movement itself, or, as Hegel would put it, of the mediation between history and the present, in terms of self-knowing Spirit.

In the same volume, in the article “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History”¹¹⁴³, Ricœur had already sketched the two approaches to the history of philosophy that he deemed possible for the philosopher to take:

By a way of a “logic of philosophy” which looks for a coherent meaning throughout history, or by way of a “dialogue” with philosophers and particular philosophies, a dialogue which is always unique and exclusive.¹¹⁴⁴

In this article, he concedes that both approaches are constitutive of the construction of a historical narrative; there is thus a complementarity between the perspective on history as an “extensive development of meaning” and as “an irradiation of meanings from a multiplicity of organizing centers”.¹¹⁴⁵ Nonetheless, even though both these perspectives are, according to Ricœur, valid (at least in the sense that we can understand *why* one can take them) he does implicitly admit his preference for the second standpoint, the one which privileges the singularity of dialogues which form a plurality of centers emanating meaning. That much is implied when he assumes that “no man who is immersed in history,

¹¹⁴¹ Ricœur, “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth” in *History and Truth*, pp. 41-56.

¹¹⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 43. On the connection between philosophical discourse and the unity of truth in the early Ricœur, see Michel Renaud, “O discurso filosófico e a unidade da verdade nas primeiras obras de P. Ricœur” in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 46/1 (1990): 19-48.

¹¹⁴³ Ricœur, “Objectivity and Subjectivity in History”, in *History and Truth*, pp. 21-40.

¹¹⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

¹¹⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

however, can arrange the total meaning of those radiated meanings.”¹¹⁴⁶

As a consequence, even though the construction of a “logic of philosophy”, as the one developed by Eric Weil in the wake of Hegel, is possible, Ricœur seems to imply that it is not more than a mere possibility, insofar as the finitude of our understanding prevents us from asserting categorically a fully teleological development of meaning in history. He therefore wagers on the deepening of these singular encounters which he will later thematically deal with in his hermeneutic theory of reading. At this point, Ricœur uses a metaphor, that of friendship, to explain the link between the philosopher from the past whose work is made available by the fixation provided by writing, and the philosopher from the present, the one who, through his act of reading, encounters the work from the past when making his own philosophy: “This long frequentation of an author, or of a small number of authors, tends toward the kind of close, exclusive relation that a man may have with his friends.”¹¹⁴⁷

What we are thus faced with here is an *intersubjective* definition of truth. A truth that is made up, each time, by the *communication* between several different perspectives. This is made clearer in “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth”. On the one hand, every great philosophy is defined by a peculiar *style*. In a way, every great philosophy is *unique*, and to try to compare philosophies so radically different as, for instance, Plato’s and Hegel’s, might result in a shallow exercise. As such, every philosophy might be radically characterized and situated against the backdrop of its particular questioning; thus the classic definition of truth as *adaequatio intellectus et rei* (adequation of thought to reality) becomes the adequation of “answers to questions, of solutions to problems. And the great philosopher is the one who revives a problematic and offers a solution for it.”¹¹⁴⁸

As is now becoming apparent, Ricœur’s definition of truth is partly *contextual* and partly *pragmatic*. However, to say that it is contextual is not akin to saying that it is monadic or solipsistic. It is contextual because it is ineluctably marked by the *situation* of he or she who begins a specific questioning, marked by his or her own position in existence. And it is pragmatic because it is tied to the

¹¹⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹¹⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹¹⁴⁸ Ricœur, “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth”, *op. cit.*, p. 48.

solutions that must be brought to these specific problems. By doing this it obeys a logic of question and answer. *Ergo*, there is an inbuilt methodological concern in the quest for truth because, clearly, assuming one methodology or another will lead to different questions and different answers.

Consequently, truth appears as something very different from a timeless and impersonal abstraction. It can only appear to be such an abstraction because it takes on the form of a *horizon*:

The idea of truth is sustained only by the *duty of thinking*. Henceforth, the other term which pairs off with history is not the idea of truth but *my* personal search whose idea of truth is on the horizon as my intended goal.¹¹⁴⁹

Now, it is clear that this search for truth *could* be monadic, insofar as it is supposed to be *my* truth. As Kierkegaard would put it, “I need a truth which is a truth for me, an idea for which I can live and die”.¹¹⁵⁰ However, it is not, because – and this is crucial for the course of conflict we are following – it is open to the *conflict of interpretations*, at this point in time defined by Ricœur as the *loving struggle* (borrowed from Jaspers) and whose definition we have already seen above. I will allow myself to quote a longer passage:

We now approach an intersubjective definition of truth according to which each one “explains himself” and unfolds his perception of the world in “combat” with another; it is the “*liebender Kampf*” of Karl Jaspers. Truth expresses the being-in-common of philosophers. *Philosophia perennis* would then signify that there is a community of research, a “*symphilosophieren*”, a philosophizing-in-common wherein all philosophers are in a collective debate through the instrumentality of a witnessing consciousness, he who *searches* anew, *hic et nunc*. In this debate, the philosophies of the past are always changing their meaning; the communication that saves them from oblivion and death brings out the intentions and possibilities of response that their contemporaries had not seen. (...) These renovating interpretations constantly shift the pivotal point of the initial doctrine.¹¹⁵¹

¹¹⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

¹¹⁵⁰ This is taken from Kierkegaard’s journals (the so-called *Papirer*), and I found it quoted by David F. Swenson, *Something about Kierkegaard*, edited by Lillian Marvins Swenson (Macon: Mercer University Press, 1983), p. 40.

¹¹⁵¹ Ricœur, “The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth”, pp. 51-52.

This very dense citation has a lot to unpack. It contains, in a nutshell, some of the most important features of Ricœur's dialectic of sedimentation and innovation, and also of creativity and creation of meaning through the act of reading that will mark the hermeneutic stage of Ricœur's production and which we will explore in further detail in part four. Here we can arguably find a depiction of Ricœur's ideal of philosophical research: an ideal where one's questioning is aided by the questioning of others, one where one *struggles* to find his or her truth, the response to his or her questions, and even to impose his or her own standpoint, but through an act of *communication* with tradition, and with others.

There is, of course, the following problem: the written work does not answer; and because of this, the act of communication risks being unilateral. Ricœur would find an answer to this objection, already posed by Plato, in the opening up of different interpretations that is allowed for by the fixation in writing. Therefore, truth is an *horizon*, a *task*, which is made up by the constant intersections between different searches for it, and what is endless is this task itself, the search for truth; furthermore, the "object" of truth taken as a whole is therefore something to be *interpreted*, it is not a merely "cognitive" issue, in the scientific sense of this word that is conferred by the natural sciences.

Ricœur draws a modest epistemological conclusion from these reflections. He argues that the fact that I am right, that I am in the right direction in my search for truth, is more a matter of "hope" than of Absolute Knowing. This applies especially to objects that transcend the bounds of all experience, such as the knowledge of God. This much we had already seen in part one, when discussing Ricœur's Post-Hegelian Kantianism. But now we see the consequences of this standpoint for his theory of knowledge. In this article, Ricœur thus proposes that we say that we hope we are "within truth" (*je suis dans la vérité*) instead of the more arrogant *I have the truth*¹¹⁵² because actually no one can claim to apprehend the whole process, which is beyond the bounds of our finitude.

The conclusion to be drawn is that the unification of these singular perspectives can only be provisional. Unity is a "wish and endeavor"¹¹⁵³ and truth

¹¹⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 55.

¹¹⁵³ See Ricœur, "Note on the Wish and Endeavor for Unity", in *History and Truth*, pp. 192-196.

can, at most, be organized in several different intersecting circles.¹¹⁵⁴ This attests the fundamental fact of the plurality of interpretations and Ricœur goes so far as to state that the interpreter that moves beyond the different historical narratives – and between the different spheres and circles of truth, we could also say – is like a chess player simultaneously playing several different matches: “We enchain, abandon, and resume several histories, much as a chess player who plays several games at once, renewing now with one, now with another.”¹¹⁵⁵

This strong image of a strategic reader of alternative narratives or interpretations suits well Ricœur’s own methodology, as is easily attested by his books, where he seems to fight battles on several different fronts, before arriving at his own standpoint. We are now at the threshold of Ricœur’s thematic exposition of the conflict of interpretations. But let me start by grounding this notion in a more systematic connection between the notions of perspectivism and truth in Ricœur’s thought.

3.4.2 – Perspectivism, truth and the conflict of interpretations

In section 3.3.1 above I analyzed Ricœur’s take on perspective and perspectivism in *Fallible Man*. This account is probably the more exhaustive take on this topic that we can find in his writings. However, there are some meaningful connections that we can establish between the philosophical position known as perspectivism, and the notion of conflict, namely the conflict of interpretations such as it has been established by Ricœur, and that he himself did not fully draw.¹¹⁵⁶ These were obviously not drawn in 1960 in *Fallible Man* because the conflict of interpretations only gets thematic attention a few years later. What I want to argue now is that we can find in Ricœur’s work an intrinsic connection between a perspectivistic notion of truth – which is at the same time marked by cognitive finitude (the constraints of perception analogically grafted onto the problem of interpretation) and linguistically embedded – and a method that tries to get to the truth as much as possible, by trying to enlarge that perspective through

¹¹⁵⁴ See Ricœur, “Truth and Falsehood”, in *History and Truth*, pp. 189-190.

¹¹⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 186.

¹¹⁵⁶ I offer a fuller account on the connection between hermeneutics and perspectivism, partially through the conflict of interpretations, in Gonçalo Marcelo, “Perspectivismo e Hermenêutica”, in *Impulso* 24/59 (2014): 51-64.

the process of the conflict of interpretations. I am aware that this is a complex claim and that it needs to be spelled out in more detail. I also further clarify that this is by and large my own interpretation of Ricœur's own standpoint and method, certainly supported by his writings, but somehow sorting out the pieces of his theoretical puzzle in my own way. Hence, this section will clarify in more detail the connection between truth and method in his philosophy. But firstly, let me take a step back and make a short digression on the notion of perspectivism, in order to pinpoint its main epistemological traits, as well as its historical roots, so that I can later finally show how it intersects with Ricœur's conflict of interpretations.

Perspectivism is often discredited as an untenable philosophical position, depicted as being self-refuting and many times confused with relativism. As Alexander Nehamas has rightfully argued, perspectivism is different from relativism, in that I can assert that a given perspective is the best perspective for me, (that it is, so to speak, *my truth*) without wanting everybody else to adhere to it.¹¹⁵⁷

If we are to understand perspectivism, we first have to break down the hermeneutic significance of notions such as "point of view" (or situated perspective) and horizon. Perspectivism is something like the theoretical generalization of a simple assertion: our everyday experience of perception is naturally experienced as stemming *from a certain angle*. From this, it tends to leap towards the affirmation of the ineluctably situated aspect of perception. It goes without saying that the roots of this notion and its common usage derive from that of perspective, or "point of view". Now, as Mário Jorge de Carvalho points out, the notion of point of view itself derives from the experience of vision and its limitations and properties, "specifically with the identification of the way in which the characteristics of vision are dependent on an observer's situation in space."¹¹⁵⁸ He points out that the fragmentary character of our visual perception always leads to an unequal apportionment of the "visible" and the "invisible" in our perception. In fact, what we are always seeing are really "points", in that each perception,

¹¹⁵⁷ See Alexander Nehamas, *Nietzsche, Life as Literature* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1985), p. 72: "Perspectivism does not result in the relativism that holds that any view is as good as any other; it holds that one's own views are the best for oneself without implying that they need be good for anyone else."

¹¹⁵⁸ See Mário Jorge de Carvalho, "A further point of view on points of view" in *Proceedings of the European Society for Aesthetics*, vol. 4 (2012): 15.

even if it entails a relation to totality and the anticipation of meaning, is always only a tiny fragment of all possible perception. From these phenomenological observations we arrive at the conclusion that if we perceive something in such and such a manner from “here” or “there”, someone else (or some other viewpoint) from somewhere else, will probably *see it differently*, whether or not I have access to that alternative viewpoint.

Husserl makes this aspect of perception very clear in paragraph 41 of his *Ideen*. The perception of the object is that of a “continuity of changing perceptions”¹¹⁵⁹, a continuity made up of the irreducible multiplicity involved in those perceptions. As mentioned before, our phenomenological perception of the object amounts to nothing more than a flux of silhouettes and profiles, from which we construct the object as such. Now, this aspect of perception of objects and, by analogy, of reality itself as being partial, limited, finite, was accounted for in our philosophical tradition centuries before Husserl’s detailed phenomenological analyzes. I can only offer a very partial and incomplete depiction of it, and only in the very specific points which are of interest for my main argument.

One of the more important traits, and that amounts to a certain version of perspectivism, is the possibility to take this epistemic condition of our perception of objects and to analogically transform it into a certain configuration which is characteristic of oneself. I can see things in a certain manner, different from the way in which everybody else sees them. Did not Frege argue that, ultimately, when I am with a friend and see a tree with green leaves, I am not sure that the “green” I see is the same “green” seen by my friend in his *Vorstellung* of the tree in front of us, because we each have particular representations of it? And at a deeper level, regardless of our representations, cannot the issue of multiplicity of perspectives be stated metaphysically? It certainly can, and Leibniz’s *Monadology* is sufficient proof thereof. In fact, in paragraph 57, Leibniz states that there are as many universes as there are monads, because each monad expresses a different point of view.¹¹⁶⁰

¹¹⁵⁹ See Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book, General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, translated by F. Kersten, (The Hague: Martinus Nijhoff, 1983), p. 86.

¹¹⁶⁰ See G. W. Leibniz, *Monadology*, edited by Nicholas Rescher (Pittsburgh: University of Pittsburgh Press, 1991), §57, p. 24: “And as one and the same town viewed from different sides looks altogether different, and is, as it were, *perspectivally* multiplied, it similarly happens that, through the infinite multitude of simple substances, there are, as it were, just as many different

Whether Leibniz wanted it or not – and I most certainly think he did not – this was already a step towards full-blown, radical relativism, both in epistemological and moral terms, because it granted ontological grounding to perception pluralism. A few centuries later, and with the complex and many-sided revolution of German Idealism in between, Nietzsche would advance the far more radical thesis according to which “there are no facts, only interpretations.” Now, this is of far graver consequences than Husserl’s depiction of the flux of silhouettes. In fact, Husserl maintains the epistemological grounding of objectivity, in his own terms, whereas in a Nietzschean standpoint we really risk falling back into full-blown relativism. Nietzsche’s quarrel with the “truth”, with science and objectivity is well known and has been widely debated. We can accept that his own epistemological standpoint is a moderate perspectivism, such as the one which is upheld by Nehamas, and therefore save it from its self-refuting possibilities; or we can indeed choose to classify it as self-refuting. Be that as it may, Nietzsche, probably of the brightest geniuses of Western thought, brings about changes in our philosophical landscape that cannot be ignored. He also put forward an early version of what am I claiming Ricœur is achieving with the conflict of interpretations, i.e., a better grasp of the phenomena at stake in his philosophy. According to Nietzsche’s own version, what we reach through perspectivism and the complementarity of perspectives is a more complete objectivity; for him, this is accomplished through a complementarity not only of our perspectives, but indeed of our “affects”:

There is *only* a perspectival seeing, *only* a perspectival ‘knowing’; the *more* affects we are able to put into words about a thing, the *more* eyes, various eyes we are able to use for the same thing, the more complete will be our ‘concept’ of the thing, our ‘objectivity’.¹¹⁶¹

With this last passage, we can catch a glimpse of Nietzsche’s genius. The

universes, which however are only the perspectives of a single one according to the different *points of view* of each monad.”

¹¹⁶¹ See Friedrich Nietzsche, §12 of the third essay of *On the Genealogy of Morality*, edited by Keith Ansell-Pearson and translated by Carol Diethe (Cambridge, Cambridge University Press, 2007), p. 87. On this notion of objectivity in Nietzsche and also on the meaningful way it can be connected with the type of “enlarged thinking” I mention in Kant several times in this thesis, see João Constâncio, “Verso un ‘ampliamento del modo di pensare’. Il *sensus communis* di Kant e la nozione di ‘obiettività’ di Nietzsche in GM III 12” in *Teorie e pratiche della verità in Nietzsche*, edited by Pietro Gori and Paolo Stellino (Pisa: Edizioni ETS, 2012), pp. 75-100.

fact that he chooses to speak about affects means that for him perception, and hence also knowledge, can only be realistically envisaged as an embodied process. By claiming this, he anticipates Merleau-Ponty and Ricœur. In the same way, his insistence on perspectivism foreshadows modern hermeneutics. Indeed, in a way, by insisting in the inescapable character of interpretation in all human knowledge, he can be credited with being one of the modern “rediscoverers” of the fundamental character of hermeneutics; as such, he is as much a precursor of Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricœur – as well as, in many different ways, Derrida, Foucault and the Frankfurt School – as Schleiermacher and Dilthey. We will see below how Ricœur captures the resemblance between his project and Marx’s and Freud’s by insisting on their common project of a hermeneutics of suspicion. However, the difficulty of Nietzsche’s claim lies in his own interpretation of “objectivity”. The challenge brought about by the assertion that “all is interpretation” cannot be taken lightly. In fact, assuming that all is indeed interpretation, how can we separate valid or invalid, good or bad interpretations?

The answer, in my opinion, has to be tied up with the adoption of a certain method. This is, of course, the modern, Cartesian answer: not only do I need to be right, I also need to be *sure* I am right, that what I found has a solid enough status of epistemic certainty. But to uphold this thesis is, *eo ipso*, to be at odds with the other major hermeneutic figure of the late 20th century, Gadamer. Next section will deal with the differences between his take on the relation between truth and method, and Ricœur’s.

But let me come back to the limitations of our own perception, in order to show how these can be, up to a certain extent, be made to apply to our interpretation taken as a whole. Mário Jorge de Carvalho emphasizes, “paradoxical as it may seem, the realm of vision and the visible corresponds to something that can only be discovered by peeping through an extraordinary multitude of ‘keyholes’.”¹¹⁶² When we apply this, *mutatis mutandis*, to interpretation, we can feel how serious the epistemological threat falling upon our heads is. We may find ourselves to inhabit a world that is more unknown to us – no matter how familiar we feel with it – than we might be ready to admit. Carvalho captures this well with the depiction of it as labyrinth: “whether we are conscious of it or not, the realm

¹¹⁶² Mário Jorge de Carvalho, “A further point of view on points of view”, p. 8.

of vision is full of hiatuses – it is, as it were, full of ‘folds’ and ‘trap-doors’ where the unseen looms. Like a labyrinth, it is full of ‘peripeteiai’ and possibilities of revision.”¹¹⁶³ However, as he also stresses, there are indeed possibilities of revision of the “seen” because we do have some kind of access to other “angles”, other perspectives. If this is the perception of an object we are talking about, I can simply move, change my angle, and get a different profile.

Now, if this is interpretation we are talking about, and let me now adopt a narrow definition of interpretation as textual interpretation, in the sense I will mention in the next part of this thesis, the access to other *angles* might very well be provided by the act of *reading*. And this inevitably has methodological implications. In fact, if we are those beings whose being consists in interpreting, or, in Heidegger’s words, if in the “existential constitution of Dasein” is rooted the phenomenon of “the understanding which interprets”¹¹⁶⁴ (and this is the broader, ontological definition of interpretation) and if each and every time the new experiences we acquired potentially bring about a refiguration of the totality of experience we are immersed in, and the meaning we confer upon it, it might very well be that the *revision* of our own standpoint, the discovery of new *horizons* and the enlargement of our own horizon is our own way of being in the world.

To take it a step further, it might as well be that this is one of the tasks of the hermeneutic philosopher, or, for that matter, of philosophy in general. In order to spell out this claim, I will have to come back to Ricœur’s onetime explicit connection between hermeneutics and Kantianism, which I mentioned in part one. As it was stated, it was meant to emphasize that both hermeneutic philosophy and the Kantian “philosophy of limits”, as Ricœur sees them, implicitly recognize human finitude, and hence the finitude of every act of interpretation. This is seen, furthermore, as a structural impediment to the overblown pretensions of exhaustive, complete knowledge.

Now, my claim is that in Ricœur’s rejection of Hegelianism and embracing of Hermeneutics in the context of a Kantian framework, we find a meaningful and creative alternative. This alternative will be largely grounded in the hermeneutical methods of creative reading, linguistic innovation, and so forth.

¹¹⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 14.

¹¹⁶⁴ See Martin Heidegger, *Being and Time*, translated by John Macquarrie and Edward Robinson (Malden: Blackwell, 1962), §32, “Understanding and Interpretation”, p. 195.

But I want to claim that even though Ricœur did not explicitly assume it, there was at work in his hermeneutic methodology, and specifically in the conflict of interpretations, a research method that is intrinsically tied up with his perspectivistic notion of truth (which can be compared to Nietzsche's, to some extent) and that more or less follows some indications contained in Kant's critical philosophy. Since this might seem a complicated claim, I will attempt to shed some light in it by taking a step back into Kantianism.

In several writings, and most notably of which in §40 of the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* to which I alluded in passing above, Kant provides some formal indications concerning "ways of thinking". In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* he calls them "maxims of the common understanding" and he lists three of them: the unprejudiced way of thinking, the broad-minded way of thinking, and the consistent way of thinking. In simpler terms, he breaks this down as the need "to think for oneself", "to think in the position of everyone else" and to "always to think in accord with oneself".¹¹⁶⁵ Or, in still other terms, this could be dubbed something like the following advice: when thinking, try to be autonomous, to take other perspectives into account, and to be coherent. This is, in a nutshell, a whole research program. Or at least a minimalist depiction of some of the essential features for putting forward a sound interpretation (or for producing a sound judgment, as Kant would probably have depicted it).

Mário Jorge de Carvalho, in a couple of articles¹¹⁶⁶ has shown how in Kant's work these notions are meant to avoid "logical egoism". He clarifies that what is at stake in the "broad-minded way of thinking" is not necessarily taking into account the perspectives of others, but simply *other* perspectives than the one we are assuming at any given moment. That is, this has to do with other logical possibilities. When assessing a given phenomenon, why limit oneself simply to what others have thought before? Why not mention other possible – whether or not they are feasible is another problem – perspectives? Hence, what Kant aims is at a "logical pluralism" which, in its second maxim, (the broad-minded way of thinking) indeed aims at an enlargement that could result in a maximal perspectivism. To be clear, I am not affirming that Kant held a perspectivistic

¹¹⁶⁵ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §40, p. 174.

¹¹⁶⁶ See Mário Jorge de Carvalho, "O egoísmo lógico e a sua superação", *op. cit.*, and also "Problemas de desconfinamento de perspectiva", *op. cit.*

notion of truth; that claim would be simply wrong. But, according to his account, to be able to satisfy the conditions of the broad-minded way of thinking, one would have to take the maximum number of other possibilities of judgment into account. In the *Critique of the Power of Judgment* what Kant wants is to liberate reason from its passive use, from what he calls “prejudice” or “superstition”. He uses the metaphor of the enlightenment to name the contrary of superstition, that is, the sound use of reason. As such, in order to avoid being “narrow-minded”, Kant asserts that we need to put ourselves in a “universal standpoint”¹¹⁶⁷ and ties its conditions to the exercise of reflective judgment. Certainly, this “universal standpoint” has nothing to do with Hegel’s Absolute Knowing, since Kant clarifies that this is to be done by “putting oneself into the standpoint of others”.

Now, as is easy to see, this is an incredibly demanding task. And if this is what is really needed in order to produce sound judgments and interpretations, let me ask: how many of us, when putting forward claims, really strive to do this? And even if we strive, how far along are we capable of exerting this pressure to our own claim? I will refrain from providing any tentative answer to this question, because it might be an embarrassing one. And yet, difficult as it might seem, I am convinced that Ricœur tried (in a voluntary or involuntary manner, I do not know, and neither does this matter) to obey to that criterion of the broad-minded way of thinking. That is, through his own fragmentary style fed by the conflict of interpretations, he tried to take the perspective of others (or if we prefer, *other* perspectives) into account, when constructing his own theoretical proposal. As such, and I have asserted this in several different places, Ricœur’s philosophy can be characterized as being an *informed original thinking*. Original, because he tries to be autonomous in giving his own interpretations. Informed, because when trying to put forward his claims, he does not ignore other perspectives, but rather uses and acknowledges them as best as he can. As to knowing whether or not his thinking is consistent, that is the most problematic claim, because his ideas evolved through time. But I do think there is a coherent kernel to it, and because of that I will try to put forward my own synchronic interpretation of it in part six.

Ultimately, these three principles, and the possibility of enlarging one’s perspective, have evidently been detected and upheld in creative ways by many

¹¹⁶⁷ Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, §40, p. §175.

others before me. Hannah Arendt, for instance, follows Kant's lead of the connection between these principles, reflective judgment and the communicative establishment of *sensus communis* and gives it a practical application. In her depiction of the agonistic public space, she includes the possibility of communication through the enlarged standpoint, the putting oneself in the place of others (thus, in a much less formalized version than Habermas's). Hence, according to her interpretation, reflective judgment would be the implicit political judgment of Kant's critical philosophy.¹¹⁶⁸ Ricœur, for his part, in "Aesthetic Judgment and Political Judgment", an article included in *The Just*, mentions the "lovely phrase 'a broadened way of thinking'"¹¹⁶⁹ and, stating how it turns us "other possible judgments", seems to commend it.

However, if this is valid for a theory of judgment such as Kant's, its validity must ultimately also hold for hermeneutic philosophy and its embeddedness in language. This is not the place to draw a history of hermeneutics. But I do want to emphasize how this might play out in the linguistic domain of interpretation. Gadamer forcefully argues that language (*Sprachlichkeit*) is the medium of hermeneutic experience.¹¹⁷⁰ Taking the same paragraph 41 of Husserl's *Ideas* we already mentioned above as his point of departure, he states that as in perception, we can also speak about "profiles" or shadings in language. However he strongly emphasizes how each of these perspectives can aim at encompassing totality and, furthermore, how each "shading" seems to want to encompass the other and can in fact do so:

In the same way as with perception we can speak of the "linguistic shadings" that the world undergoes in different language-worlds. But there remains a characteristic difference: every "shading" of the object of perception is exclusively distinct from every other, and each helps co-constitute the "thing-in-itself" as the continuum of these nuances – whereas, in the case of the shadings of verbal worldviews, each one potentially contains every other one within it – i.e., each worldview can be extended into every other. It can understand and comprehend, from within itself, the "view" of the world presented in

¹¹⁶⁸ See Hannah Arendt, *Thinking, Willing, Judging* (Chicago: Chicago University Press, 1982) and "The Crisis in Culture" in *Between Past and Future* (New York, Viking Press, 1961), pp. 197-226.

¹¹⁶⁹ Ricœur, "Aesthetic Judgment and Political Judgment According to Hannah Arendt", in *The Just*, p. 105.

¹¹⁷⁰ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, pp. 384-404.

another language.¹¹⁷¹

There is thus something like a principle of universal translatability of verbal worldviews into one another. He further adds that the discovery of these new worlds does not entail, *eo ipso*, a forgetting of our own cultural background and worldview (this kind of possibility would probably appear to Gadamer as almost being absurd). He illustrates this proposal with the beautiful metaphor of the traveler:

Thus, we hold, the fact that our experience of the world is bound to language does not imply an exclusiveness of perspectives. If, by entering foreign language-worlds, we overcome the prejudices and limitations of our previous experience of the world, this does not mean that we leave and negate our own world. Like travelers we return home with new experiences. Even if we emigrate and never return, we still can never wholly forget.¹¹⁷²

These descriptions seem to capture well how this process works, or at least should work, in non-pathological cases (which are always, evidently, possible). And let me add a personal note to attest how they strongly resonate with my own Portuguese background and cultural heritage, with its emphasis on the experience of adventure and discovery, yet at the same time with the characteristic longing for a situation of return, which duly expresses our fundamental experience of belonging, so well described by Gadamer.

What must be emphasized is that Gadamer fully supports, even though not using the same terms, the notion of “broad-minded way of thinking” or “perspective enlargement” which we alluded to. This is in fact a process akin to what he described as the “fusion of horizons”, which is arguably the key to the type of hermeneutic experience he puts forward. He captures well many of the features we have been describing in the following passage:

Every finite present has its limitations. We define the concept of "situation" by saying that it represents a standpoint that limits the possibility of vision. Hence essential to the concept of situation is the concept of “horizon.” The horizon is the range of vision that

¹¹⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹¹⁷² *Ibid.*

includes everything that can be seen from a particular vantage point. Applying this to the thinking mind, we speak of narrowness of horizon, of the possible expansion of horizon, of the opening up of new horizons, and so forth.¹¹⁷³

Therefore, it is not only that Gadamer legitimates the extension of the notion of horizon from optical properties to our interpretive faculties. It is that he stresses its possibilities of expansion. He further emphasizes that:

The historical movement of human life consists in the fact that it is never absolutely bound to any one standpoint, and hence can never have a truly closed horizon. The horizon is, rather, something into which we move and that moves with us. Horizons change for a person who is moving. Thus the horizon of the past, out of which all human life lives and which exists in the form of tradition, is always in motion.¹¹⁷⁴

We can see that Gadamer's account of this phenomenon is highly favorable, even laudatory. According to him, this process could be one of continual expansion. We could say, for instance, that insofar as life is a continual accumulation and experience, and interpretation thereof, one's horizon keeps expanding. But it might be possible that this is not so. To be sure, one can, through the reification of bad habits, keep on living without doing much learning and therefore without radically expanding horizons. Of course that we know what Gadamer has in mind: some prejudices are good and even constitutively shape the way in which we see the world; the recovery of meaningful traditions is the best way to orient oneself in the world, and so forth.

In fact, Gadamer stresses that the phenomenon which Ricœur will later describe as a dialectic between sedimentation and innovation is best captured as a fusion of horizons, whereby the horizon of the present time is constitutively formed by that of the past, to the point in which they almost fuse, as it were:

In fact the horizon of the present is continually in the process of being formed because we are continually having to test all our prejudices. An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past. There is no more an isolated

¹¹⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 301.

¹¹⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

horizon of the present in itself than there are historical horizons which have to be acquired. *Rather, understanding is always the fusion of these horizons supposedly existing by themselves.* We are familiar with the power of this kind of fusion chiefly from earlier times and their naiveté about themselves and their heritage. In a tradition this process of fusion is continually going on, for there old and new are always combining into something of living value, without either being explicitly foregrounded from the other.¹¹⁷⁵

Now, this description is probably too one-sided; the emphasis on tradition alone risks obnubilating the possibility that something really *new* comes along in human history, and in a way it runs against the emphasis on human praxis of all Critical Theory that we have seen above.

Be that as it may, Gadamer does not shy away from formulating a comprehensive hermeneutic theory. He ultimately comes to the conclusion that hermeneutics is a universal phenomenon. It is universal because it is grounded on language (*Sprachlichkeit*). The whole third part of *Truth and Method* is an ontological definition of hermeneutics as founded on *Sprachlichkeit*. Its ontological cornerstone is easy to grasp: “*Being that can be understood is language*”.¹¹⁷⁶ This does not entail that there are not non-linguistic entities or properties. But it does entail that what can be understood presents itself in a linguistic manner and that, insofar as our experience of orientation in the world is an experience of interpretation, the only type of being that really *matters* to us, is the one that expresses itself in language, the one that can be understood. Gadamer’s conclusion is straightforward: “in view of the experience of art and history, we were led to a universal hermeneutics that was concerned with the general relationship of man to the world.”¹¹⁷⁷

Let me stress the abovementioned point: for Gadamer, hermeneutics is universal. We could say that he has a “continuist” position regarding the phenomena of language and hermeneutics. Even though they take place in different domains, such as art and history, the different modes in which these phenomena are grounded can in principle be explained by one overarching principle, that of the fusion of horizons with the past, etc. What is more, Gadamer posits some sort of prior agreement that forms living communities, and which is,

¹¹⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹¹⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 470.

¹¹⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 471.

in itself, a linguistic agreement or understanding:

Language has its true being only in dialogue, in coming to an understanding. This is not to be understood as if that were the purpose of language. Coming to an understanding is not a mere action, a purposeful activity, a setting up of signs through which I transmit my will to others. Coming to an understanding as such, rather, does not need any tools, in the proper sense of the word. It is a life process in which a community of life is lived out.¹¹⁷⁸

This position could perhaps be described as a linguistic *Sittlichkeit*. It certainly emphasizes the importance of something like a lifeworld but, coherently with its continuist standpoint, it puts the emphasis on language. However, the strange fact is that the understanding (in the sense of *entente*) and even the possibility of dialogue are stated *a priori*. It is as if a communitarian political philosophy took its inspiration in a prior fiction, like the liberal fiction of an ahistorical social contract.

Now, even though Ricœur agrees with Gadamer in many points and was inspired by his hermeneutic theory in several aspects, the universal trait of language and hermeneutics is, I would argue, a major source of contention between the two. Ricœur agrees with Gadamer that any “being that can be understood is language”, even though he will tend to emphasize, much more than Gadamer, the existence of pre-linguistic layers of experience. This is evident in his ambiguous attempts at a philosophy of life, such as all the times he insists on the primacy of the *conatus*. To be sure, he does not (nor, in my opinion, does Gadamer) contend that all being *is* language, but rather that being that assumes *significance for us* is language. But the object of contention is the unity of language itself, as well of the way of capturing, depicting and interpreting language, the world, and all the phenomena within it. In a way, Gadamer offers a more complete hermeneutical theory than Ricœur. But Ricœur’s hermeneutical toolbox is ultimately much better prepared than Gadamer’s to spell out a practical philosophy capable of understanding and responding to the many challenges in our life. It is more nuanced. And maybe, even though it contains no overarching principles *stricto sensu*, it does turn out to be more encompassing than Gadamer’s, because it brings so much more significant elements into account. In a nutshell,

¹¹⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 443.

unlike Gadamer, Ricœur wagers on the *conflict of interpretations* and provides a diagnosis of the *broken status of language*.

Right at the outset of *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur states that language is precisely the area where “all philosophical investigations cut across one another”¹¹⁷⁹, namely those, in the 1960s, of Wittgenstein, Heidegger, Bultmann, anthropology, ordinary language philosophy, psychoanalysis... But instead of seeing in it a somewhat unitary phenomenon, he rather seems dumbfounded by this fragmentation.

We have at our disposal a symbolic logic, an exegetical science, an anthropology, and a psychoanalysis and, perhaps for the first time, we are able to encompass in a single question the problem of the unification of human discourse. The very progress of the aforementioned disparate disciplines has both revealed and intensified the dismemberment of that discourse. Today the unity of human language poses a problem.¹¹⁸⁰

And what problem is this? Simply put, each of these disciplines tends to claim – to a greater or lesser degree – that its analyzes are encompassing. Each seems to want not only to deplete its object, but to transform it in the universal hermeneutic key explaining, basically, almost everything. This brings Leibniz’s depiction of a viewpoint as a perspective over the whole to a new level. Because not only do these theories provide alternative interpretations of reality; they also provide different rules to which a good interpretation must obey. This problem is thus really a constitutive difficulty. Nietzsche stated that there are only interpretations. But if this is not to let us completely disoriented in a world in which no distinctions are made, we must be able to find a canon for the producing of sound interpretations. But it seems that we are left in a situation of *aporia*, because seemingly equally valid claims which are however apparently contradictory, draw our attention. Ricœur’s conclusion is brutal; there is *no* universal hermeneutics:

The difficulty – it initiated my research in the first place – is this: there is no universal hermeneutics, no universal canon for exegesis but only disparate and opposed theories concerning the rules of interpretation. The hermeneutic field, whose outer contours we

¹¹⁷⁹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 3.

¹¹⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 3-4.

have traced, is internally at variance with itself (*brisé*).¹¹⁸¹

We can therefore discern at least two levels of conflict operating here: the first is a conflict at the level of content, of *what* a certain phenomenon will be revealed to be, as a result of being encompassed by a certain theory. The second is a meta-conflict: *how* will that theory have arrived at such a conclusion and what are the implicit or explicit rules and principles governing that interpretation and which will also, in a stable theoretical framework, guide the description and interpretation of other phenomena in a similar manner. This *agon* will assume a bewildering array of forms in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur. At this point, in 1965 in the book on Freud, it will assume mainly two: the conflict between a hermeneutic as recollection of meaning and what Ricœur dubs a “hermeneutics of suspicion”, and a second conflict, somewhat derived from the first one, between archeological and teleological hermeneutics. We will spell out what is at stake in this debate in the next part of this thesis. But for the moment let me just emphasize that it is precisely the existence of this meta-conflict that forces Ricœur to really take into account the methodological aspect at stake in hermeneutics. For him, in fact, something in which there is not necessarily a conflict – even though there might be a creative, dialectical tension – is the relation between truth and method. Now, this puts his standpoint in stark contrast with Gadamer’s.

3.4.3 – Ricœur and Gadamer on truth and method

Both Ricœur and Gadamer subscribe to a version of what came to be known as the hermeneutic circle. This notion is in itself very ancient but was mainly defined by Heidegger in the 20th century, whose ontological take on hermeneutics was overwhelmingly influent in all subsequent hermeneutic research; and Heidegger chooses to stress precisely the importance of precomprehension.

As such, for both Gadamer and Ricœur, as well as for Heidegger, philosophy does not start, in itself, anything anew. But what this means for its own method is a source of contention. In fact, Ricœur states already in *Fallible Man* that the insertion in the hermeneutic circle is not incompatible with the adoption

¹¹⁸¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 26-27.

and emphasis of a certain method:

This means that we must completely dissociate the idea of method in philosophy from the idea of a starting point. Philosophy does not start anything independently: supported by the non-philosophical, it derives its existence from the substance of what has already been understood prior to reflection. However, if philosophy is not a radical beginning with regard to its sources, it may be one with regard to its method. Thus, through this idea of a difference of potential between the non-philosophical precomprehension and the methodical beginning of elucidation, we are brought closer to a well-defined working hypothesis.¹¹⁸²

This would only be made fully explicit in the 1980s, with what Ricœur calls the dialectic between explanation and understanding. It must be stressed that in the context of the development of Ricœur's philosophy, even though conflict played a part since the beginning, its methodological pertinence only becomes fully apparent with the hermeneutic turn.

Now, for Gadamer, the relation between truth and method is rather presented as an *alternative*. This is made clear from the very first pages of *Truth and Method*:

The following investigations (...) are concerned to seek the experience of truth that transcends the domain of scientific method wherever that experience is to be found, and to inquire into its legitimacy. Hence the human sciences are connected to modes of experience that lie outside science: with the experiences of philosophy, of art, and of history itself. These are all modes of experience in which a truth is communicated that cannot be verified by the methodological means proper to science.¹¹⁸³

Commenting on the way in which this issue is addressed in Gadamer's most important work, and its perhaps misleading title, Ricœur makes a perceptive comment:

The very title of the work confronts the Heideggerian concept of truth with the Diltheyan concept of method. The question is to what extent the work deserves to be called *Truth*

¹¹⁸² Ricœur, *Fallible Man*, p. 4.

¹¹⁸³ Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, p. xxi.

AND Method, and whether it ought not to be entitled instead *Truth OR Method*.¹¹⁸⁴

which has a rather self-evident answer: for Gadamer, the relation of truth and method is more of a disjunction than a conjunction.

In fact, Gadamer equates the methodological concern with the scientific approach. And for him, this is always a *secondary* concern. In this, he follows Heidegger's ontological grounding of hermeneutics. In this view, the sciences entail an alienating distancing that forces one to forget the essential belonging that is constitutive of our orientation in the world. There is actually a thesis in which Gadamer is in fact, up to some extent, in agreement with the Frankfurt School: science can be seen as a tool of instrumental reason. For him, this is particularly evident in the way science uses language: it creates a *method*. Now, this method is for him in blatant contradiction with the universal character of hermeneutics as dialogue, in the sense I mentioned above.

Ricœur disagrees with this view. He develops a dialectical relationship between truth and method, through his own radical rearrangement of explanation and understanding. I will not fully explicate this dialectic here, only in the next part of the thesis; but, in a nutshell, what can be said is that for him our primary goal is the understanding of truth; however, Ricœur also argues that there is an inbuilt solidarity between truth and method, in that methodological procedures will be instrumental – and this not in a pejorative way – in the search for truth. Hence, he proposes that phases of understanding will alternate with phases of explanation. In fact, this is very coherent with his longstanding insistence on the need for *mediation*, or what he calls the “long route”, the one that goes through a “great detour”.

Apparently, the genealogy of the notion of “long route” in Ricœur's philosophy stems, at least in part, from Plato's Seventh Letter. We can find this interesting passage in Ricœur's Lectures on Plato and Aristotle, from the Strasbourg period:

The Seventh Letter aims at dissolving a snare of the philosophy of essences: philosophy is not an anti-Heraclitean chitchat about essences. Philosophy is difficult, it always takes an effort, a sacrifice. Essence is not what is nearer, rather what is farther. This letter, which

¹¹⁸⁴ Ricœur, “The task of Hermeneutics” in *From Text to Action*, p. 71.

entails a morality of knowledge, has the same emphasis we can find in the last scolium of Spinoza's *Ethics*: "All things beautiful are as difficult as they are rare". Truth's time is a time with its own maturation, its own rhythm and which is very different from the time of industry, where we can always speed up a fabrication process. The Sophists made it possible to believe that philosophical education was just a technique that we could facilitate or hasten. Instead, it is a discipline which bears more resemblance to the purification of mysteries than with the artisan's technique; essence is always grasped by the "long route". Plato's terminology is in here the same used by the Pythagoreans and Parmenides: philosophy is a route, a journey. Distanciation from truth is thus a first reason for us to multiply the degrees of knowledge: the topic of the intermediaries is introduced like an ascetical progression. Each stage is there fulfilling a negative role: it is not yet the truth.¹¹⁸⁵

This is an important quote and it has a lot to unpack. In fact, as I have been arguing throughout this chapter, even though Ricœur seems to adopt an epistemological standpoint corresponding to a particular strand of perspectivism, this does not mean that it is a perspectivism incompatible with truth. Now, I would argue that this truth appears as a limit idea, but that it is striven for, precisely through the procedure of the mediations and the long route / long detour. In the quote above, it would seem that, commenting on Plato, Ricœur would be adhering to a strictly idealistic view, defending truth as some kind of "essence". This could even be supported by the fact that in his early career, as we have seen, Ricœur was influenced by the Husserl of the *Ideas*. Whether or not this is the case for the lectures on Plato and Aristotle, it certainly does cease to be so as soon as Ricœur definitely enters his hermeneutic phase. He does maintain this metaphor of the

¹¹⁸⁵ See Ricœur, *Être, essence et substance chez Platon et Aristote. Cours professé à l'Université de Strasbourg en 1953-1954*, edited by Jean-Louis Schlegel (Paris: Seuil, 2011), p. 41: "Le sens de la *Lettre VII* est de dénoncer un piège de la philosophie des essences : la philosophie n'est pas un bavardage anti-héraclitien sur les essences. La philosophie est difficile, elle demande toujours un effort, un sacrifice. L'essence n'est pas le plus proche, mais le plus lointain. Cette lettre, qui implique une morale de la connaissance, porte le même accent que la dernière scolie de l'*Éthique* de Spinoza : 'Tout ce qui est beau difficile autant que rare.' Le temps de la vérité est un temps qui a sa propre maturation, son propre rythme et qui est bien différent du temps de l'industrie où l'on peut toujours raccourcir un procédé de fabrication. Les Sophistes ont laissé croire que l'éducation philosophique était une technique comme les autres, qu'on peut hâter et faciliter. C'est une discipline qui a plus de parenté avec la purification des mystères qu'avec la technique des artisans ; l'essence est toujours la 'voie' longue. Le langage platonicien est ici le même que celui des Pythagoriciens, de Parménide : la philosophie est une voie, un voyage. L'éloignement de la vérité est une première raison de multiplier les degrés du savoir : le thème des intermédiaires est introduit à titre de progression ascétique. Chaque stade n'est là que comme un négatif : il n'est pas encore la vérité." [My translation]

long effort / detour, and he will always emphasize the voluntary and ascetic aspects of it: in fact, in many different ways, the concepts of work and effort will remain vital for his definition of philosophy. However, the “long route” will be opposed to a “short route” as two opposing hermeneutic styles. And even though the “route” will keep changing directions, bifurcating and crisscrossing to the point in which any attempt at cartography will inevitably have a shape close to an intricate labyrinth, the fact is that Ricœur emphasizes that this is the route of language in its many forms: myths, signs, literary works, and so on.

A first attempt to define this long route is made in “Existence and Hermeneutics”¹¹⁸⁶, a crucial article, which opens the seminal *The Conflict of Interpretations* and that, in a way, sums up some of what we have seen in this part of our dissertation, and also initiates in a definitive manner the hermeneutic sources from which his later philosophy will draw some of its inspiration.

Right from the start, Ricœur states that his purpose is to “explore the paths to contemporary philosophy by what could be called the graft of the *hermeneutic problem* onto the *phenomenological method*.”¹¹⁸⁷ The fact that Ricœur stresses that the method he is talking about is the *phenomenological* one should not be understood in a narrow sense. Indeed, what Ricœur is worried at this point in time is with legitimating the hermeneutic problem, in relation to his own background, still understood as having a major debt to phenomenology. What hermeneutics brings about is, among other aspects, the immersion in language. And the methodological analyzes of language will originate different methods, such as structuralism and psychoanalysis. But that the metaphor of the graft is used to theoretically ground the connection between hermeneutics and phenomenology is a testament to the fact that for Ricœur, phenomenology came first, and that inscribing hermeneutics within that horizon opens up radically new possibilities. This is, in a way, some sort of homage to the role phenomenology plays in modern hermeneutics, and the recognition that it is within the phenomenological field that hermeneutics would be rediscovered in the 20th century. Indeed, this is coherent with the likely historical origin of the metaphor of the graft which, as it has been noted by Boyd Blundell, probably stems from Saint

¹¹⁸⁶ See Ricœur, “Existence and Hermeneutics” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 3-24.

¹¹⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 3.

Paul, who speaks about the gentiles being grafted into the tree of Israel.¹¹⁸⁸ Thus we have the image of an ancient lineage, enriched by its new offspring. Nonetheless, as we shall see more thoroughly in the next part, in the interaction between phenomenology, structuralism and psychoanalysis, none will really assume a preponderant weight. And the ground for this theoretical framework would be laid exactly in the article we are dealing with now.

Now, at the fore of Ricœur's onto-methodological manifesto of this significant piece of his production, is his ambiguous relationship with Heidegger. On the one hand, he credits Heidegger with having dealt away the idealistic interpretation of Husserl's phenomenology. On the other hand, he reproaches Heidegger (and a fortiori Gadamer, as we have seen) with having become blind to the methodological problems and their respective fertility for hermeneutics, because of his insistence on immediately grounding hermeneutics in ontology, with his *Daseinsanalytik*:

There are two ways to ground hermeneutics in phenomenology. There is the short route, which I shall consider first, and the long route, the one I propose to travel. The short route is the one taken by an *ontology of understanding*, after the manner of Heidegger. I call such an ontology of understanding the "short route" because, breaking with any discussion of *method*, it carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover *understanding*, no longer as a mode of knowledge, but rather as a mode of being.¹¹⁸⁹

But what is thus the "long route", at this point in time, for Ricœur? In what manner does it differ from Heidegger's alleged "short route"? And ultimately, why is Ricœur suspicious of shortcuts and direct apprehensions of "truth" or too hasty ontological constructions? Let me start by answering the first two questions. In fact, for Ricœur, at the start of his hermeneutic turn, the "detour" that the "route" must assume is the one through language. In a way, the later Heidegger, as well as – we have seen it – Gadamer, agree with the fundamental importance of language for our interpretation as Being-in-the-world. Similarly, as Heidegger and Gadamer, in the 1960s Ricœur will still wants to develop an ontology; but this will

¹¹⁸⁸ See Paul, Romans 11, 17-24, quoted by Boyd Blundell, "Creative Fidelity", *op. cit.*, p. 89.

¹¹⁸⁹ Ricœur, "Existence and Hermeneutics", p. 6.

already be something like a *postponed* ontology, almost something of an aborted one.

This means the dialectic between truth and method is already affirmed here. Method will help us to understand truth as much as possible, but a definitive explication of that truth and the consequent possibility of a solid ontological grounding will prove to be elusive. But it also means, likewise following Heidegger, that the understanding of the world, and truth, will at the same time be a disclosing of ourselves as Being-in-the-world. Interpretation and self-interpretation will thus almost assume the same extension – and with this, Ricœur recuperates his earlier influences, stemming both from existentialism and reflective philosophy. He thus proposes that understanding, and self-understanding, go through a process of learning, that they explore the frontiers of semantics and reflection, before returning to themselves. This is in fact his alternative to Heidegger's stance, his own positive proposition at this point in time:

that of substituting, for the short route of the Analytic of Dasein, the long route which begins by analyzes of language. In this way we will continue to keep in contact with the disciplines which seek to practice interpretation in a methodical manner, and we will resist the temptation to separate *truth*, characteristic of understanding, from the *method* put into operation by disciplines which have sprung from exegesis. If, then, a new problematic of existence is to be worked out, this must start from and be based on the semantic elucidation of the concept of interpretation common to all the hermeneutic disciplines.

[But]... a purely semantic elucidation remains suspended until one shows that the understanding of multivocal or symbolic expressions is a moment of *self*-understanding; the *semantic* approach thus entails a *reflective* approach. But the subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the *cogito*: rather, he is a being who discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that he is placed in being before he places and possesses himself.¹¹⁹⁰

As we can see, Ricœur is undertaking here, in this programmatic text and namely in the above quote, a very complex connection of different theoretical influences which he aims to integrate in his project. The passage through semantics, and

¹¹⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 11.

namely through the meaningful theories that, in a way, *add something to the truth about the self* – like psychoanalysis, Marxism, Hegelianism, etc. – transforms reflective philosophy in that its horizons will be radically problematized and thereby transformed, by the abovementioned assertion that language is broken and that all we are left with is the conflict of interpretations and its dialectic.

In the rest of this article, which inaugurates and gives theoretical grounding to Ricœur's first hermeneutics (and which will be more thoroughly analyzed in chapter 4.1 below) Ricœur eventually puts forth a criteriology of interpretation that aims at justifying both the existence of the conflict of interpretations – their content – and the meta-conflict of their methodologies, in the context of his own project. But his stroke of genius, the one that provides him with a certain unity of intention (if not completely of topic, method and conclusions) between his first incursions in existential and reflective philosophy, and his hermeneutics¹¹⁹¹ is that he specifically grounds the different methodologies, and therefore the different aspects of truth revealed by each theory, in different aspects of existence:

In every instance, each hermeneutics discovers the aspect of existence which founds it as method.¹¹⁹²

Now, this could lead us to conclude that the “truth” with which Ricœur is worried about is only the truth “about ourselves”, and not with the world and reality itself. As such, it would be a reflective philosophy, or a hermeneutic philosophy, but without any significant breach beyond ourselves.

It is undeniable that the hermeneutics of the self is of crucial importance for him. But this stroke of genius, the one that makes each different theory reveal a fundamental aspect of existence, would in fact later be taken further, by the adoption of a similar method but with different results. In fact, six years after the publishing of the *Conflict of Interpretations*, in *The Rule of Metaphor*¹¹⁹³ (and in fact, already before, since the beginning of the 1970s, and the preparatory texts of

¹¹⁹¹ On the connection of reflective philosophy and hermeneutics in Ricœur see Luís Umbelino, “Dualidade e Mediação. Raízes Reflexivas da Hermenêutica de Paul Ricœur”, in *A Filosofia de Paul Ricœur*, edited by Fernanda Henriques, *op. cit.*, pp. 93-107.

¹¹⁹² Ricœur, “Existence and Hermeneutics”, p. 19.

¹¹⁹³ See Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor. The Creation of Meaning in Language. Translated by Robert Czerny with Kathleen McLaughlin and John Costello, SJ* (London: Routledge, 1977).

these books and of his mature hermeneutics taken as a whole) Ricœur would talk about the discovery of new aspects not only of existence, but also of *reality* itself through the adoption of an alternative standpoint: that of semantic innovation taking place at a metaphorical level. And indeed this metaphorical process can also be seen as providing an alternative model for grasping what is at stake in the process of understanding itself. Such an attempt has recently been made by George Taylor.¹¹⁹⁴ Still other possibilities are available, such as taking the paradigm of translation as the model for hermeneutics. Ricœur himself seems to have hinted at this possibility in his late contributions, and Scott Davidson has followed and further developed this lead.¹¹⁹⁵

In this last section, I have chosen to emphasize, in a manner similar to what Daniel Frey¹¹⁹⁶ has done before me, the divergences between Gadamer's and Ricœur's hermeneutic theories. It now has become fully apparent the difference between Ricœur's and Gadamer's – as well as Heidegger's – take on the relationship between truth and method. Whereas both Heidegger and Gadamer see this as a logical disjunction, Ricœur maintains that a good hermeneutic theory will rather combine them in a dialectical conjunction. And while Gadamer accentuates more fully than Heidegger the importance of language, Ricœur accepts this linguistic turn, but chooses to introduce the conflict of hermeneutics¹¹⁹⁷ at its core and so sees no universal and encompassing hermeneutic theory, where for Gadamer there is indeed such a universal hermeneutics. For Ricœur language is fundamentally broken and dispersed, while Gadamer emphasizes the continuity between the several domains in which the hermeneutic experience takes place. Thus for Gadamer the emphasis is on the fusion of horizons, while for Ricœur this same emphasis is put on the conflict of interpretations. In what comes down to their theory of the text, and one's stance towards a given text and meaningful

¹¹⁹⁴ See George H. Taylor, "Understanding as Metaphoric, not a Fusion of Horizons" in *Gadamer and Ricœur. Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, edited by Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor (London/New York: Continuum, 2011) pp. 104-118.

¹¹⁹⁵ See Ricœur, "The Paradigm of Translation" in *Reflections on the Just*, pp. 106-120. See also Scott Davidson, "Ricœur's Later Thought. From Hermeneutics to Translation and Back Again" in *Philosophy Today* vol. 57, 1 (Spring 2013): 61-71.

¹¹⁹⁶ See Daniel Frey, *L'interprétation et la lecture chez Ricœur et Gadamer* (Paris: P.U.F., 2008), especially part one, "Le conflit des herméneutiques de Gadamer et de Ricœur", pp. 31-102.

¹¹⁹⁷ Ricœur explicitly defines the conflict of hermeneutics in the first phase of his hermeneutical theory, and the epistemological consequences this has for hermeneutics in Paul Ricœur, "Le conflit des herméneutiques: épistémologie des interprétations" in *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* 1/1 (1963): 152-184. See also, for a very good presentation of this problem, Maria Luísa Portocarrero, *A Hermenêutica do Conflito em Paul Ricœur*, *op. cit.*

traditions, as Merold Westphal recently argued, they are both caught between the dialectic between belonging and distancing.¹¹⁹⁸ This is true, even though there is also a difference of emphasis, Gadamer insisting much more on belonging and *listening*, and Ricœur emphasizing the critical aspect of distancing from one's point of departure in order to develop an internal critique. Now, this is obviously not to say that there are not similarities between these two projects. There certainly are, and if I decided to emphasize the differences, it was precisely because the similarities are so many that they can tend to become overwhelming, and obnubilate the meaningful differences that do exist. My own depiction of the conflict of interpretations needed to emphasize its departure from Gadamer's fusion of horizons.

In the next part of this thesis I will cover some of the aspects left out in this cursory incursion into the conflict of interpretations; I will also include, for instance, an assessment of the only published debate between Gadamer and Ricœur.

At the end of this part of the thesis, I hope that it has been made clear how there is a certain continuity between Ricœur's first philosophical analyzes, those dealing with existential philosophy, and the hermeneutic turn of the 1960s. I showed that the conflict of interpretations is ultimately grounded in different parts of existence and how it is through his own methodology of embracing the conflict of interpretations that Ricœur methodologically enlarges his own perspective, thus aiming at truth through interpretation and language, striving to sketch an ontology, without however ever completely developing it; i.e., without claiming to *have* the truth. In this, his interpretations of others, and of history, are of crucial importance. In fact, truth would later be seen as a *task*, and even later, it would be depicted as *attestation*, at the level of a theory of the self. It remains to be seen how his own hermeneutical toolbox will ultimately provide him with the right instruments – namely a *theory of reading* and of the *construction of meaning through reading* – to further ground both the hermeneutic methodology, and its connection with the quest for truth. But in order to fully develop this complex dialectic, conflict will have to arrive at the second stage of its course.

¹¹⁹⁸ See Merold Westphal, "The dialectic of Belonging and Distancing in Gadamer and Ricœur" in *Gadamer and Ricœur. Critical Horizons for Contemporary Hermeneutics*, edited by Francis J. Mootz III and George H. Taylor, pp. 43-62.

Part Four

The Hermeneutic Conflict

Ricœur's hermeneutic turn can be located at a precise point in time, at least in terms of his publications. We have seen in part three how in *Fallible Man* he sketches a philosophic anthropology that revolves around the notions of fragility and fallibility. This philosophic anthropology, valuable as it is for our own investigation on conflict, is nonetheless written by Ricœur only as an introduction, a preparatory study that needed to exist in order for philosophical reflection to be able to delve into an applied hermeneutic exploration. Thus in the second part of the second volume of the *Philosophy of the Will*, *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricœur aims at going from the possibility of evil to its reality, from fallibility to fault.¹¹⁹⁹ I shall note in passing that evil is obviously radically tied to the existence of conflict. In radical cases of conflict, such as violence, or in the decline of the will that consists in wanting something bad, having a bad maxim, what we find is the possibility of political and moral conflict, either in the form of violence against a fellow human being or in the choosing of a bad maxim over a good one.

In the *Symbolism of Evil* the goal is to undertake a culturally specific investigation dealing with the symbols of evil in the Babylonian, Greek and Hebrew traditions. How is it that the human being, a being who is constitutively fragile and prone to failure, comes to actually fail, to incur in a fault, and to feel guilty about it thereafter? More importantly, how does this guilt express itself in a permanent manner that is inscribed in one's specific culture and what does this reveal about our human nature? These are some of the questions Ricœur is addressing in 1960. The book revolves around the notion of *faute*, which in French means both fault and guilt. He starts by laying out a phenomenology of confession, which is his way of trying to rationally reconstruct the religious belief that expresses itself in the symbols of evil. He thus proposes to undertake a philosophical "re-enactment" of the confession of evil, of one's fault / guilt. He

¹¹⁹⁹ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 3. On the topic of evil in Ricœur see also *Répliquer au mal. Symbole et justice dans l'œuvre de Paul Ricœur*, edited by Jérôme Porée and Gilbert Vincent (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2006) and *Paul Ricœur e a Simbólica do Mal*, edited by Fernanda Henriques (Porto: Edições Afrontamento, 2005).

describes this operation by stating that the philosopher does not feel this like the religious believer does; he rather “re-feels” it in a neutralized mode by means of a re-enactment in sympathetic imagination.¹²⁰⁰ I believe he would later express this in clearer terms in the decades to follow, when he thematically describes the hermeneutical function of distancing.

This book analyzes in detail the significance of symbols such as those of defilement, sin, guilt and all the major myths of the beginning and end of the world, including the Adamic myth and those contained in Greek tragedy, which will always remain a fertile source for Ricoeurian philosophy. *The Symbolism of Evil* is therefore of major importance for the history of religious ideas and symbols. Delving in it in detail would go beyond the purpose of this thesis. However, I will have to mention Ricoeur’s short 10 page conclusion, “Symbol gives rise to thought” (*le symbole donne à penser*) because it is of great significance for his philosophy, in that it precisely marks the beginning of his hermeneutic turn.

As is slowly becoming apparent, Ricoeur has a knack for summarizing long, complicated and nuanced debates in short formulae that finally encapsulate the whole problematic in a concise and beautiful conclusion. This was the case with “l’homme est la joie du oui dans la tristesse du fini”; now, this time, he explicates his conclusion, that symbol gives rise to thought (even though this formula is borrowed from Kant) in the following terms: “That sentence, which enchants me, says two things: the symbol gives; but what it gives is occasion for thought, something to think about.”¹²⁰¹ Ricoeur asserts that human being is immersed in language, made up of language. This does not mean that there are not pre-linguistic layers of experience. However, whatever has meaning is expressed in language. But the fact is that this expression is not always direct. As the existence of myths and symbols shows us, argues Ricoeur, some of the paths that expression can take are indirect. And because language can be symbolic¹²⁰², an interpretation is called for; as Ricoeur puts it, in a more beautiful way than I could:

¹²⁰⁰ Ricoeur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 19.

¹²⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 348.

¹²⁰² For a very good and exhaustive account of the symbolic expression of meaning in the philosophy of Ricoeur, from symbols and metaphors to narratives and Ricoeur’s mature hermeneutical theory, see Carlos João Correia, *Ricoeur e a Expressão Simbólica do Sentido* (Lisboa: Gulbenkian, 1999).

wherever a man dreams or raves, another man arises to give an interpretation.¹²⁰³

The result of this inner connection between symbolic language, like that of confession, and interpretation, is a definition of symbol itself as being double-layered, as having a double meaning: a meaning that is patent, that expresses itself, and another, latent meaning which hides beneath the first one and that calls for an interpretation; this latter point will be made clearer in *Freud and Philosophy*. But it also has a different consequence, in terms of the task of the philosopher, as Ricœur sees it in 1960: his task comes to be defined as a “restorative critique”, that is, a task of grasping the pre-comprehension, of entering correctly in the hermeneutic circle, not by innocently believing in symbols, but rather by thinking *from* symbols, by taking them as our starting point in reflection.¹²⁰⁴

Now this of course implies a wager. In fact, we have to be convinced that these symbols that speak to me are, at least indirectly, true; as Ricœur puts it in the last sentences of this book, “philosophy endeavors, through reflection and speculation, to disclose the rationality of its foundation”.¹²⁰⁵ This trust in the fullness of language, that is, in its capacity to bear meaning, could, in itself, be a very naïf and uncritical exercise, were it not to be later complemented by its dialectical counterpart: critique as an exercise of suspicion. Be that as it may, the first phase of Ricoeurian hermeneutics is marked by this insistence on symbols as being dual, constituted by a double meaning, and by the effort to find the latent meaning that lies beneath what is at first apparent.

In the years after the publishing of *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricœur would radically enlarge his hermeneutical toolbox, and develop it in unexpected ways that would ultimately transform his philosophy altogether. Why and in what manner? A few biographical details need to be addressed¹²⁰⁶. The first, most radical experience certainly is the discovery of Freudian psychoanalysis as an approach that would become complementary to Ricœur’s early phenomenological analysis of consciousness. In fact, Freud had proved to be an influence for Ricœur ever since his contact with the lectures of Roland Dalbiez, who had been Ricœur’s

¹²⁰³ Ricœur, *The Symbolism of Evil*, p. 350.

¹²⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

¹²⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 357.

¹²⁰⁶ A detailed account of this period can be found in parts six (“Face aux maîtres du soupçon: 1960-1970, pp. 289-365) and seven (“L’aventure de Nanterre”: 1965-1970, pp. 369-435) of Dosse’s biography. See Dosse, *Les sens d’une vie*, *op. cit.*

teacher in his youth. However, it was only in 1958, after having read an article by Antoine Vergote¹²⁰⁷, that Ricœur started to seriously tackle Freud's works, and teaching his psychoanalytical theory in his lectures. At this point in time, he undertook a systematic reading of Freud's complete works in German. His first production in this domain took place precisely in 1960, in the context of a symposium organized by Henri Ey and taking place in Bonneval.¹²⁰⁸ This was followed by three conferences in 1961 in Yale (The Terry Lectures) and eight conferences in 1962 in the context of the Université Catholique de Louvain's Chaire Mercier. These would be the kernel of *Freud and Philosophy* and it is in these lectures that finally the notion of a conflict of interpretations takes shape, namely with the affirmation of the hermeneutics of suspicion, as we have seen in the last chapter. In a nutshell, we can say that the Freudian discovery of the unconscious proves to be, for Ricœur, another confirmation of the encrypted character of consciousness, and of the need to find a suitable technique to decipher it, a technique of interpretation. I will dedicate a chapter in this part to psychoanalytic conflict, which is of the utmost importance for Ricœur.

However, this is not the only decisive influence in Ricoeurian hermeneutics. In fact, the context of 1960s intellectual France bore testimony not only to a lasting influence of Marxism and psychoanalysis but also, significantly, to the linguistic turn, largely inspired by Saussure, and resulting in structuralism. In his characteristic fashion, Ricœur refused both to totally accept or totally reject its premises, which radically criticized Ricœur's own phenomenological background; instead, he chose to accept their challenges and, ultimately, to integrate their analyzes, to the best of his abilities, in his own philosophy. This is true both in what concerns Lévi-Strauss's structural approach and Greimas's semiotic analyzes.

Lévi-Strauss's *La Pensée Sauvage* was published in 1962. Ricœur decided to organize a reading group with his team in Esprit and one year later they engaged in a direct debate with Lévi-Strauss (among the participants were, for instance, Kostas Axelos and Pierre Hadot). The result, "La pensée sauvage et le

¹²⁰⁷ See Antoine Vergote, "L'intérêt philosophique de la Psychanalyse freudienne", in *Archives de Philosophie* XXI (janvier-mars 1958), quoted by Dosse, *Les sens d'une vie*, p. 290).

¹²⁰⁸ And whose text, "Consciousness and the unconscious" was republished in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 99-120.

structuralisme” was published in 1963.¹²⁰⁹ In this interesting debate, Ricœur refuses to closely distinguish between explanation and understanding, but he certainly tries to recuperate the structuralist method as a part of the explanatory procedures needed in the effort of understanding. He goes so far as stating that “we can never practice hermeneutics without structuralism”.¹²¹⁰ However, he is also, as in the case of psychoanalysis, setting out to discover its limits.

Again, the same can be said vis-à-vis Greimas’s – whom Ricœur encounters in 1968 – semiology. According to Dosse, Ricœur’s relationship with Greimas was as close as he could get to the famous *liebender Kampf* that we already mentioned several times. In this debate, each one wanted to include the other’s theory in his own approach; to Ricœur’s own insistence in the encompassing character of the hermeneutic circle, Greimas opposes the totalizing aspect of semiotics: everything can be analyzed in semiotic terms and thus broken down into its signifying elements. As a consequence of this intersection with semiotics, Ricœur’s theory of the text would grant a major importance to semiotic analysis, as we shall see below.

However, structuralism and semiotics are only one part of Ricœur’s delving into the linguistic domain. We have seen in the previous chapter how language was a topic of discussion between Gadamer and Ricœur, and how even though Ricœur appreciates and up to a certain extent agrees with Gadamer’s depiction of *Sprachlichkeit*, he contends that we have no single universal hermeneutic key. Precisely because of that fragmentation, he aims at understanding the inner workings of all these theories of language, without conceding that any of them is universal. It is against this background that he discusses Saussure’s linguistic theory, his distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and, more importantly, tries to develop a philosophy of *discourse* in the wake of Émile Benveniste. This would, in turn, lead to Ricœur’s own theory of the text.

A last piece in this complex puzzle of the theoretical influences at work in Ricœur’s hermeneutics is the discovery of analytical philosophy and, most of all, of ordinary language philosophy, as it is exemplified in the works of Austin, Searle, Anscombe and the later Wittgenstein. In fact, Ricœur would act as an

¹²⁰⁹ See Claude Lévi-Strauss, Paul Ricœur, et. al. “La pensée sauvage et le structuralisme” in *Esprit* 31/11 (novembre 1963): 628-653.

¹²¹⁰ Ibid., p. 635 (quoted in Dosse, p. 318)

introducer of most of these strands in France, due to another biographical fact: from 1969 onwards, he was responsible, in partnership with François Wahl, for the collection “L’ordre philosophique” at the French publisher Le Seuil. This collection, which still exists nowadays – now run by Jean-Claude Monod and Michaël Foessel, after a period in which Alain Badiou and Barbara Cassin replaced Wahl and Ricœur – had Ricœur at its helm for decades. It was in the context of that collection that Gadamer’s *Truth and Method* was published for the first time, and as a result of a steadfast commitment assumed by Ricœur. In the collection were also published some of the classics of analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language, such as Austin’s *How to do things with words*¹²¹¹, Strawson’s *Individuals*¹²¹² and Frege’s main works¹²¹³ in French translations. Up until that time, these authors were not really mainstream in the French philosophical landscape. It must also be emphasized that one of Ricœur’s longstanding theoretical concerns in this period was the articulation between Husserlian phenomenology – and the possibility of putting forward a phenomenology of language, with or without Husserl – and analytic philosophy, mainly the philosophy of the later Wittgenstein and ordinary language philosophy.¹²¹⁴

Moreover, Ricœur hosted a CNRS seminar in Paris, which lasted from 1967 to 1979 (November-May each year, from 1967-1971 at Sorbonne’s “Salle des Indiens” and then from 1972-1979 at Rue Parmentier). This seminar, which had a strong adhesion from international researchers, was dedicated to discussing analytical philosophy and the philosophy of language. It also served as a means for Ricœur to discuss his new lines of research with a group of motivated and

¹²¹¹ John L. Austin, *Quand dire c’est faire* (Paris: Seuil, 1970).

¹²¹² P. F. Strawson, *Les individus. Essai de métaphysique descriptive* (Paris: Seuil, 1973).

¹²¹³ Gottlob Frege, *Les fondements de l’arithmétique* (Paris: Seuil, 1970) and also Frege, *Écrits Logiques et Philosophiques* (Paris: Seuil, 1971).

¹²¹⁴ This possible connection is explored in some of Ricœur’s lesser-known articles. On the connection of Husserl’s and Wittgenstein’s respective theories of language, see Paul Ricœur, “Husserl and Wittgenstein on Language” in *Phenomenology and Existentialism*, ed. E. N. Lee e M. Mandelbaum (Baltimore: John Hopkins University Press, 1967). On the possibility of putting forward a phenomenology of language and the way in which, following the footsteps of Merleau-Ponty, it had been developed in France in the 1960s, see Ricœur, “New developments in phenomenology in France: The phenomenology of language” in *Social Research* 34/1 (1967): 1-30. For an account of the connection between phenomenology and philosophy of language in the trailblazing works of the German phenomenologist Alexander Pfänder, and the meaningful way in which this connection can be revitalized by ordinary language philosophy, see “Phénoménologie du vouloir et approche par le langage ordinaire”, in Ricœur, *Écrits et conférences 3: Anthropologie philosophique*, op. cit., pp. 147-171.

knowledgeable graduate students. The group discussed texts of Austin, Searle, Anscombe and, most of all, the later Wittgenstein. Subjects so important for that period of Ricœur's production were discussed first and foremost with that group, such as the topics of hermeneutics (1972-1973), imagination (1973-1974), narrativity (1976-1977) and history (1977-1979). The work method consisted in Ricœur providing a long introduction, followed by questions, discussion, and, in each of the sessions, a presentation by one of the graduate students and international scholars. Usually, these contributions were published in the collection of the CNRS. They sometimes provide, along with other of Ricœur's important lectures¹²¹⁵, very important summaries of the sources with which Ricœur dealt when developing his own philosophy.

Even if rendering a complete depiction of Ricœur's hermeneutical theory is not the goal of this section, I will venture to lay out its main traits, recurring to the important *polycopié* called *Cours sur l'herméneutique* (Lectures on Hermeneutics), which was lectured in 1971 at the Université Catholique de Louvain. Ricœur's hermeneutical theory has, broadly speaking, two distinct phases. We can even distinguish, for analytic purposes, a general hermeneutic theory (whose object are myths, signs, symbols, sentences, discourse, and, finally texts – in a nutshell: language and its works, the meaning of its events) and a hermeneutics of the self¹²¹⁶, properly dealing with the way in which the subject constitutes itself through the long detour of the interpretation of language. As Scott Davidson and Johann Michel rightly emphasize, quoting Bernard Stevens (who is in turn quoting Ricœur himself)¹²¹⁷, the hermeneutics from the 1960s is

¹²¹⁵ Namely the so-called *polycopiés*, lectures that were very famous at the universities in which Ricœur gave them, and so were made publicly available in those universities, without however having been published by any major publisher. In fact, very few Ricœur lectures were published during his lifetime, with the notorious exception being the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, edited by George Taylor. However, some of these *polycopiés* are now in the process of being published. I mention a few of them in this thesis, such as *Être et essence chez Platon et Aristote*, the *Cours sur l'herméneutique* and *La sémantique de l'action*.

¹²¹⁶ On this first phase of the hermeneutics of the self, and the topic of the subject before *Oneself as Another*, see Manuel Sumares, *O Sujeito e a Cultura na Filosofia de Paul Ricœur. Para além da Necessidade* (Lisboa: Escher, 1989). On the Hermeneutics of the self and of the human condition, with a good overall presentation of Ricœur's hermeneutics in its main traits, see Miguel Baptista Pereira, *A Hermenêutica da Condição Humana de Paul Ricœur* in *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra* 24 (2003): 235-277.

¹²¹⁷ See Davidson's and Michel's preface to *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies (ERRS)* vol. 1, number 1 (2010): 7. See also Bernard Stevens, *L'apprentissage des signes: lecture de Paul Ricœur* (Dordrecht, Kluwer, 1991). The origin of this formulation is to be found in Ricœur's *Freedom and Nature*, p. 13 [Modified translation].

conceived in terms of an “apprenticeship of signs”. What is at stake is, as we have seen, a hermeneutics based on symbols as a dual structure that contains both a patent and a latent meaning. Thus Ricœur emphasizes the way in which these symbols come about, how they are constructed and the layers of meaning they convey, as well as the significance they have for the way in which the subject interprets him or herself. This first phase is marked by both an extension and a delimitation of the early phenomenological method, in debate, as I just mentioned, mainly with structuralism, and psychoanalysis, and also extending to a phenomenology of religion. In particular, the debate between Freud and Hegel concerning the formation of consciousness would assume a particular importance, as both their theories represent a particular process of the formation of consciousness and meaning. This first phase will receive proper attention in sections 4.1, 4.2 and 4.3 below. One of the main emphases will be granted to psychoanalysis in section 4.2, because it reveals a new, and fundamental domain in which conflict will unfold in a decisive manner for us. The second hermeneutic phase, the one that roughly starts after the publication of *The Conflict of Interpretations* in 1969, and extends up until the publication of *From Text to Action* in 1986 focuses much more on the hermeneutics of texts (such as the dialectic between distancing and appropriation in the theory of writing and reading), in the refiguration of the world through the three types of mimesis, in the phenomena of semantic innovation in metaphor and narrative, and in the particular interaction with the domain of social philosophy and human action in general (sometimes understood using the metaphor of the text). Sections 4.4, 4.5 and 4.6 will analyze in detail the dialectic between explanation and understanding, and the phenomenological, linguistic and hermeneutic analyzes of action that Ricœur undertakes in the 1970s. However, in order that a general presentation of his hermeneutic theory, in its main points, be made, I find it useful to return to the *Cours sur l’herméneutique* because, although it was written in the early 1970s, it already contains, in a didactic and condensed manner, some of the systematic developments that would eventually appear in the later hermeneutical theory. It thus operates as a mediation between the two phases that we will analyze in detail in the chapters below. I will afterwards complete this introduction by briefly mentioning Ricœur’s work on metaphor and narrative, two products of productive imagination, and also by concisely alluding to how the conflict of interpretations

unfolds in some of the texts of this period pertaining to Biblical exegesis.

In his famous Lectures on Hermeneutics, Ricœur already defines, and this right from the start, hermeneutics as being coextensive with the problem of understanding texts.¹²¹⁸ Therefore, after briefly sketching a history of hermeneutics, from the applied exegeses of texts in Antiquity, to the reappearance of the term *Hermeneutik* in eighteenth century Germany, he dedicates the first part¹²¹⁹ of these lectures to the theory of the text. Ricœur reminds his listeners/readers, at that time the students in Louvain (today Leuven), that unlike in Germany, French and francophone philosophers when analyzing language and wanting to delineate something like a hermeneutic theory, felt obliged to include properly linguistic analyzes. This happened, according to him, because the French cultural scene in the social sciences was heavily influenced by Saussure and his linguistic theory. He proceeds by recalling Saussure's distinction between *langue* and *parole*, and the four main laws of his linguistic theory, the one made famous in his *Cours de Linguistique Générale*, namely 1) linguistic units are differential and oppositive; 2) all their relations are of form and not of substance; 3) these relations can be synchronic or diachronic and we cannot mix the two, since we cannot simultaneously ask how a given system works at a certain time and how its parts change; 4) a linguistic system is a closed system of internal dependencies and all oppositions take place within closed systems.¹²²⁰

Ricœur stresses that while the fourth axiom is the most important one, because it is precisely this closed character that provides linguistics with the finite object and the set of laws that allows it to become a science, it also is the most *problematic*. In fact, one of Ricœur's longstanding theses will be that language is *never* only about *itself*, but also always at the same time *about the world*. It is not entirely self-referential. Its reference will be reality, even if, at times, this can be a very different reality than what we are used to.

Thus Ricœur distances himself from Saussure's linguistics and rather chooses to take as his point of departure Émile Benveniste's own linguistic analyzes, in order to undertake a hermeneutic not of language (*langue*), but rather of *discourse*. The first meaningful difference between these two approaches is that

¹²¹⁸ Ricœur, *Cours sur l'herméneutique*, *op. cit.*, p. 2.

¹²¹⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 9-66.

¹²²⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 10-11.

its constitutive units are not the same: for a linguistics of language these are signs, understood as being in a synchronic relationship with each other, whereas for a linguistic theory of discourse, these are *sentences*. In Saussurian linguistics meaning can be reduced to the analysis of signs. And a sign is nothing more than a double-faced phenomenon: a signifier and a signified. As such, signs are intrinsically arbitrary and the relation between signifier and signified is purely linguistic, that is, it does not turn us towards what goes beyond language.

However, for Ricœur, there is more to meaning than this. On the one hand, discourse happens as an event. On the other hand, it can only be understood as meaning.¹²²¹ Now, the meaning of what is said is itself an object of dispute and therefore open to the conflict of interpretations; and this has decisive consequences, because language has the power to express reality and even to define the self, through narrative.

This can, of course, take place in a number of different ways. One of the questions that intrigued Ricœur was the fate of discourse in writing. He concedes that language is fragile¹²²² but he claims that this frailty is provided a solution with the invention of writing: *verba volant, scripta manent*. Eventually, Ricœur would even undertake to answer Plato who, in the *Phaedrus*, addressing the myth of the invention of writing, accuses written works of being orphan, left without the author who wrote them.

With the theory and even the apology of writing, a new emphasis is put forward: hermeneutics deals not only with sentences, but also with texts. This, in turn, calls for a theory of reading. Both Gadamer and Ricœur rightly emphasize the importance of this theory of reading, the difference between them being that Ricœur is much more attentive to the plurality of different readings than Gadamer, which ultimately brings him closer to Umberto Eco's notion of "open work":

With writing, the other becomes virtual. Something written addresses itself to anyone who can read (Gadamer). The potential audience is not predetermined by the closed situation of dialogue; writing shatters that closed situation. In dialogue we have an interlocutor, in

¹²²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹²²² *Ibid.*, p. 25.

writing we have an audience. We therefore arrive to the notion of “open work” (Eco). Every work is open to an undetermined number of readers and readings.¹²²³

Daniel Frey has rightly emphasized that the main difference between Gadamer’s and Ricœur’s theories of reading is that for Gadamer truth is primordial. It is expressed in tradition and reflected in the text as well as, a fortiori, in reading. Thus the active part of construction of meaning on the part of the reader is kept to a minimum. Reading is understood as an application of interpretation. Whereas for Ricœur truth is an effect of meaning – and let us recall that meaning is dependent on the conflict of interpretations – and therefore the reader is forced to take an active part not only in the discovery but also, in some way, in the creation of this meaning. Therefore, for Ricœur, reading is much more than “pious hearing”.¹²²⁴ It is, up to some extent, an active exercise of critique where belonging and appropriation are problematized by distanciation and reformulation. This is partly what Ricœur expresses with his notion of the “world of the text” and it is thus tantamount to his claim that in the act of reading this world “intersects” with the world of the reader and thus that each finite act of interpretation is, in a sense, unique and different. In part seven I will argue that this is not always the case in Ricœur, but whatever the case may be, it is more so in Ricœur than in Gadamer.

Consequently, every reader is always, whether he wants it or not, somewhat original, because his act of understanding will, up to some extent, be different from all the others. To this corresponds also a notion of originality of authors; in fact, Ricœur stresses the importance of the notions of (authorial) work and particular style, following Gilles-Gaston Granger. Indeed, he states that it is the notions of work and style that mediate between discursive events and meaning.¹²²⁵

In the second part of these lectures Ricœur introduces the major contributors to hermeneutic theory, from Schleiermacher and Dilthey to Heidegger and Gadamer, in order to later spell out, in the third part, his own second version of the methodology of interpretation. The theory of reading is here crucial. It is in

¹²²³ *Ibid.*, p. 31. [My translation]

¹²²⁴ See Daniel Frey, *L’interprétation et la lecture chez Ricœur et Gadamer* (Paris: P.U.F., 2008), p. 288.

¹²²⁵ Ricœur, *Cours sur l’herméneutique*, p. 42.

this act that Ricœur sees the dialectic between explanation and understanding, which we will see in detail below. His aim will ultimately be to sketch in a provisional manner an ontology, as we have seen, but one that sees in the texts themselves, and in their interpretations by readers, the existential possibilities that lay there for us; in a way, to read a text is to grasp an existential possibility, and this is the last, definitive way in which Ricœur grounds hermeneutics in existence. Thus the hermeneutics of the self is, properly speaking, interpretation of the “world”, and not really self-discovery. The “long detour” will be not only through signs and symbols, but also through works and texts, all the meaningful productions of our civilization.

The result of all these elements is that language and world are not kept apart but made dialectical in relation to each other. Language thus ceases to be a “closed system” and becomes an open one:

Is it not in this passage from the closed system to the open system that the transition from explanation to interpretation is also effectuated?¹²²⁶

Ricœur concludes these lectures with his often-repeated assertion that between hermeneutics and Absolute Knowing, one must choose. His last pages are dedicated to the phenomena of ambiguity in discourse and its written and poetic equivalent: metaphor. Let us recall that these were the preparatory years of his excellent *The Rule of Metaphor*. Now, even though I am not consecrating any complete chapter to this book, I do not want to underrate its value. The book is published in 1975, the same year in which Ricœur gives in Chicago his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* as well as his *Lectures on Imagination*. We can therefore safely assume that this is the period in which he dedicates more attention to what he calls, in the wake of Kant, *productive imagination*. In fact, Ricœur distinguishes between productive and reproductive imagination, consecrates an important text, republished in *From Text to Action* to imagination¹²²⁷, and he

¹²²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 188. [My translation]

¹²²⁷ Ricœur, “Imagination in Discourse and in Action”, in *From Text to Action*, pp. 168-187. For an account of Ricœur’s topic of imagination, see Jean-Luc Amalric, *Paul Ricœur, l’imagination vive. Une genèse de la philosophie ricœurienne de l’imagination* (Paris: Hermann, 2013), Maria Gabriela Castro, *Imaginação em Paul Ricœur* (Lisboa: Piaget, 2006) and George H. Taylor, “Ricœur’s Philosophy of Imagination” in *Journal of French and Francophone Philosophy*, 16/1-2 (2006): 93-104.

would publish at least four books (*The Rule of Metaphor* as well as, up to some extent, the volumes of *Time and Narrative*) to theoretical imagination, that is, more specifically, the poetic and narrative phenomena. He also consecrates his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* to practical imagination, and namely to the social imaginary.

I have no definitive explanation for this but, for one reason or another, it seems as if this year of 1975 bears witness, through Ricœur's reflection on *productive imagination*, to a level of radicality and thought vitality that in a way goes beyond all his other production. He has bolder claims in this period, both in terms of ontological insights and social and political statements, than in any other time. I will come back to this in the last part of this dissertation, arguing that there is something of that radicality that needs to be re-enacted and further developed.

In a nutshell, the goal of the *Rule of Metaphor*¹²²⁸ is to show that poetic language, namely the kind of language expressed in "living metaphors" (*métaphores vives*) is a type of language able to disclose hidden layers of reality that are usually hidden from our ordinary experience. Against ancient rhetoric, Ricœur's point of departure is not that of metaphor as a *trope*, an ornament with which we make a beautiful speech by substituting a worn out word for a more exuberant one; instead, his locus of analysis is the propositional framework within which metaphoricity is at work. Metaphors are not in themselves mere words, it is only in the context of the whole sentence that they can *make sense*. And in fact, "making sense" is the exact expression to use in this context, because this is actually what they do. When Ricœur invokes some famous poetic examples, such as Baudelaire's "Correspondences": "Nature is a temple where living pillars..."¹²²⁹, or Gerard Manley Hopkins's "Oh! The mind has mountains"¹²³⁰ he claims that the reader knows that nature does not *literally* have columns, nor mind has mountains. This much can be said about Camões's famous depiction of love: "Love is a fire that burns unseen". Love is not fire. But certainly the experience of

¹²²⁸ See Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, *op. cit.* The topic of metaphor has unfortunately not been the object of much attention in Ricœur scholarship, besides George Taylor's many insightful contributions. One of the best books available on this topic is Jean-Luc Amalric's *L'enjeu de la métaphore*. See Jean-Luc Amalric, *Ricœur, Derrida: L'enjeu de la métaphore* (Paris: P.U.F., 2006). See also George Taylor and Michael J. Madison, "Metaphor, Objects and Commodities, in *Cleveland State Law Review* 54 (2006): 141-173, and George H. Taylor, "Reenvisioning Justice" in *Lo Sguardo – Rivista di Filosofia* 12, II (2013): 65-80.

¹²²⁹ Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor*, p. 197.

¹²³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 253.

passionate loving, of letting *logos* being overcome by *thumos* and *eros*, can assume the sort of fiery, bittersweet impetus of both pleasure and pain that Camões is alluding to, in the same way the mysteries and vast regions of our inner life can be compared to an intricate landscape, one that has mountains.

This leads to what Ricœur calls, at this point in time, “metaphoric truth”. Consistently with his hermeneutic theory, he uses a semantics of discourse and written works to insist that language refers back to reality. His wager in this book, and the novelty properly speaking, is that Frege’s distinction between meaning and reference applies to *all language*, but in *different* ways. A simple empirical assertion discloses a *part* of reality, that part which is to us more evident; thus if I say that the tree in front of me stands three meters tall, or that its foliage is dense, I am not saying anything unusual or odd (except, let us say, if this is a bonsai I am alluding to). I am saying what seems, in principle, rather *self evident*, at least for anyone sharing the same categories that I use, acquainted with the metric system, etc. But if, in turn, I say that the tree is a “fountain of life”, or “the keeper of our ancestors” I am metaphorically pointing to other, symbolic dimensions that this hypothetical tree might contain.

In these types of assertions, Ricœur contends, the metaphoric function of the copula (the tree *is* this or that) assumes center stage in the metaphoric process. According to him, when formulating them, we incur in some sort of voluntary “category mistakes” (a notion borrowed from Gilbert Ryle) by virtue of which, *new dimensions of reality* are disclosed. Thus things can have multiple references; and what the metaphoric meaning points is to these poetic, symbolic realities, which no literal, prosaic use of language can grasp.

Now, if we look closely at this process, it becomes apparent that, once again, conflict plays the decisive role in it. What metaphor requires is a “semantic impertinence” and therefore a “tension between two interpretations: between a literal interpretation that perishes at the hands of semantic impertinence and a metaphorical interpretation whose sense emerges through nonsense”.¹²³¹ So this is, in fact, a conflict of two interpretations, one which “employs only values that are already lexicalized and so succumbs to semantic impertinence; the other,

¹²³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 292.

instituting a new semantic impertinence, requires a twist in the word that displaces its own meaning.”¹²³²

This last remark reveals yet another conflict: the one between sedimentation and innovation. But this particular conflict turns out to be dialectical. Living metaphors struggle with sedimented meaning; in that way, they innovate, and have to defeat the narrowness of the ancient meaning, in order to impose the new one. Ricœur follows Nelson Goodman in saying that the subject of this new, impertinent predicate “yields while protesting”.¹²³³ But this does not mean, *eo ipso*, that by acquiring new meanings, the old predicates just vanish or disappear. This might happen, when a new image or metaphor succeeds so well in describing a particular property, that we virtually forget the ancient meanings. This can also happen with metonymy, as when we speak of the “back” of the chair, by reference to the part of human anatomy that is usually in contact with that part of the chair. But the process is not necessarily based on exclusion of meaning. In fact, most of the time, this is a process whereby *new meaning* gets sedimented and thereby semantically enriches the subject we are talking about. Particular objects that are reflected on our language cease to be one-dimensional, to borrow Marcuse’s famous predicate in a slightly different way from him.

Thus in the metaphoric process there are at least two conflicts at stake: the conflict between the ancient and the new meaning and also that between tradition and innovation. However, precisely in the cases when the new meaning imposes itself without obliterating the ancient meaning, what we end up having is some sort of *enlargement of meaning*, akin to the process of *enlargement of perspective* I described above (these are largely my assertions, not Ricœur’s). Once again, this process is made possible by the conflict of interpretations.

In a way, in this hermeneutic phase of Ricœur’s production, almost *everything* can be seen as being epistemologically made intelligible through a methodological process of conflict. What I said about metaphor could also apply, to some extent, to the other process of semantic innovation Ricœur tackles, namely, *narrative*. In the three volumes of the masterpiece *Time and Narrative* what is at stake is a conflict between the several experiences and configurations of time, from lived experience to historical time and fictional narrative. Once again,

¹²³² *Ibid.*, pp. 343-344.

¹²³³ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

many processes of conflict can be detected here. There is the decisive conflict between Hegelianism and the hermeneutic method, to which I alluded in part one, a conflict in which Ricœur obviously chooses hermeneutics. There is the collision between the world of the text and the world of the reader, a conflict so decisive that only it provides meaning to the reading of any text. There is an epistemological conflict between those theories which want to rehabilitate the epistemic pertinence of narrative and those who want to fully discard it, and so forth. Also, as I mentioned before, conflict in the domain of historiography would be further pursued in *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

These descriptions could continue on and on, and be very hard to fully explicate in an exhaustive manner. Nonetheless, within the economy of this thesis, I have to restrain myself to analyzing the more significant occurrences of these conflicts, in order to be able to put forward a meaningful typology. These are the occurrences we will explicate in more detail in the chapters that immediately follow. However, two brief conclusions can be drawn already. The first is that once it reaches the hermeneutic phase, conflict ceases to be a scattered phenomenon in Ricœur's philosophy: it assumes center stage as *the* epistemological tool that animates his philosophy in its many forms. The second is that this conflict is mainly a conflict of interpretations and thus, if there is something from which Ricœur would never go back, is from his hermeneutic assumptions and method. From this point on, Ricœur sees himself as a hermeneutic philosopher. Therefore, even though he never really wrote a systematic book about hermeneutics – maybe he couldn't, maybe this reflects only his own depiction of hermeneutics as being fragmentary, conflictual and incomplete – the collections of articles about hermeneutics (*The Conflict of Interpretations, From Text to Action* and now *Écrits et Conférences 2: Herméneutique*¹²³⁴) remain some of his most important contributions to philosophy. He even tried to define, following Hans Lipps, a "hermeneutic logic".

Thus in a 1978 text, "Logique Herméneutique?"¹²³⁵, Ricœur argues that insofar as hermeneutics is a reflection on the assumptions of all understanding of the world, it assumes a transcendental character: it is hermeneutics, and the

¹²³⁴ See Ricœur, *Écrits et Conférences 2: Herméneutique*, edited by Daniel Frey and Nicola Stricker (Paris: Seuil, 2010).

¹²³⁵ See Ricœur, "Logique Herméneutique?" in *Écrits et Conférences 2: Herméneutique*, pp. 123-196.

explanation of its precomprehension of the world, as well as its avowal of an irreducible opacity and the impossibility of Absolute Logic, that in a way underpins the limits of our knowledge.¹²³⁶ Therefore, and to reiterate a claim that we have seen uttered by Ricœur many times, but now with a different grounding, hermeneutics renews with Kantianism. For Ricœur, in this text, hermeneutics assumes the inner workings of a certain logic, albeit not formal logic, but a transcendental one. It goes without saying that even though Ricœur does not emphasize it, the conflict of interpretations is an intrinsic part of this logic, inasmuch as the possibilities of transcending our perspective and incorporating other viewpoints in our interpretation goes through the conflictual process.

But perhaps the most interesting part of this text is Ricœur's articulation between analytic philosophy – mainly Wittgenstein – and hermeneutics. Ricœur argues that insofar as Wittgenstein admits that natural languages are both the basis and the horizon of all understanding, we can posit the existence of something like a hermeneutic circle in his philosophy.¹²³⁷ He further argues that we must grasp the fertility of the several language games, including the one played by philosophy but, coherently with his earlier writings, tries to link these different linguistic aspects with different modes of being, different existential possibilities (therefore grounding, in a way, Wittgenstein's philosophy on Heidegger's).

Hence, when speaking about a “logic of hermeneutics” Ricœur does not intend to say that hermeneutics must be universal, and he is far from alleging that it has one single canon. But he seems to be looking for some “rules of thumb” that help him to navigate interpretation. One meaningful objection could always be stated: don't we risk falling back upon full-blown relativism? Is not every position as good as any other in the conflict of interpretations? In order to respond to this objection, Ricœur turns to E. D. Hirsch's logic of probability. Thus in his theory of reading he comes back once again to perspectivism. This is made clear in *Interpretation Theory*. His model is still the Husserlian one: a text can be compared to an object. Like the object, it may be viewed from several sides, but

¹²³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹²³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

never from all sides at once. And “therefore the reconstruction of the whole has a perspectival aspect similar to that of a perceived object.”¹²³⁸

Every reading is unique and, in a way, one-sided. This is what Ricœur calls the “guess character of interpretation”.¹²³⁹ This means that my own first understanding of a text is something like a guess. It is the own particular way in which the world of the text collides with my own world, in its first coming. Now, this does not mean that the first guess is right and that it will not be subject to change. It can, and often will. And this because the conflict of interpretations plays a crucial role: it is conflict that opens the work to several readings¹²⁴⁰ which will be able to radically expand my own horizon and the way the world of that text will reshape my own world.

But the conflict of interpretations is in this case the procedure by which I *test* the validity of my own guess, my own interpretation. Only if my guess survives falsification will it be able to pass the test of truth and incorporate the enlarged perspective. Hence, this process belongs to the order of the probable, of the likely:

As concerns the procedures for validation by which we test our guesses, I agree with E. D. Hirsch that they are closer to a logic of probability than to a logic of empirical verification. To show that an interpretation is more probable in the light of what we know is something other than showing that a conclusion is true.¹²⁴¹

And thus we have a new version of the hermeneutic circle, one that takes place between guess and validation. Nonetheless, if this is to escape some sort of vicious self-confirmation whereby we only confirm our prejudices, no matter how wild they might be, conflict will have to play a role of falsification:

To the procedures of validation there also belong procedures of invalidation similar to the criteria of falsifiability proposed by Karl Popper in his *Logic of Discovery*. Here the role of falsification is played by the conflict between competing interpretations. An interpretation must not only be probable, but more probable than another interpretation.

¹²³⁸ See Ricœur, *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (Fort Worth, Tx.: Texas Christian University Press, 1976), p. 77.

¹²³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

¹²⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 78.

There are criteria of relative superiority for resolving this conflict, which can easily be derived from the logic of subjective probability.¹²⁴²

Ricœur further adds that the logic of validation (and probability) allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism, in that it is always possible to argue for or against an interpretation. This puts hermeneutics in the neighborhood of legal theory, with its accompanying host of judiciary conflicts. We will explore this connection in part five of this thesis. Once again, as we can see, hermeneutics is seen as an extension of Kantianism. If, for Kant, critical philosophy was what allowed us to avoid skepticism and dogmatism, for the Ricœur of the 1970s it is the conflict of interpretations that permits us to do so. But what is interesting to note is that even though Ricœur claims in the above quote that the criteria of relative superiority of one interpretation over another can be “easily derived” from the logic subjective probability, he does not tell us anything else about it. We are left wondering how exactly he wanted to make this transition, and what criteria would he arrive at. Without the clear enunciation of these criteria, this solution is perfect, but stays at a very programmatic and general level. Maybe his insistence on the fragmentary character of language and hermeneutics prevented him from elaborating such a canon. But the result is that what we are left with is some sort of rules of thumb we can ourselves elaborate: does this interpretation pretend to be final? Is it immune to falsification, in Popper’s sense? If it is, it must be false, because it is probably biting off more than it can chew, and violating our conditions of finitude. Is this other interpretation merely reductive, without being able to formulate a positive depiction of the phenomena at stake, or a solution to a certain practical aporia? So it must be too skeptical, and no good for, unless complemented by another viewpoint.

What Ricœur frequently repeats is his will to arbitrate between interpretations. Sometimes he posits their convergence. This is true, for instance, in his incursions in religious hermeneutics. For instance, in “Du conflit à la convergence des méthodes en exégèse biblique”¹²⁴³, Ricœur assesses three possible methods for biblical exegesis: the historic/critical method, the semiotic

¹²⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 79.

¹²⁴³ See Ricœur, “Du conflit à la convergence des méthodes en exégèse biblique” in *Exégèse et herméneutique*, edited by Xavier Léon-Dufour (Paris: Seuil, 1971), pp. 35-53.

method and the hermeneutic one (hermeneutic here understood, since it is a text from 1971, as the interpretation of texts through understanding and explanation). After explicating what each one of these methods consists in, he posits the need for a “convergence without eclecticism”.¹²⁴⁴ According to him, each of these methods sends us to the others. What it has not yet been made clear is what “arbitrate” or “converge” here might mean. Part 6 will attempt to make this clearer. For now, this introduction should have sufficed to show how pervasive conflict becomes, both methodologically and epistemologically, in the context of Ricœur’s hermeneutic turn. Let us now proceed to analyze its main occurrences.

¹²⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 51.

4.1 – The conflict of Interpretations: Structuralism, Psychoanalysis and the Phenomenology of Religion

4.1.1 – The architecture of meaning in Ricœur's early hermeneutics: the double meaning of symbols

I mentioned in the introduction to this part that the first phase of Ricœur's hermeneutics is marked by an analysis of symbols. At this point in time, he defines symbols by the characteristic of having two possible meanings:

I define "symbol" as any structure of signification in which a direct, primary, literal meaning designates, in addition, another meaning which is indirect, secondary, and figurative and which can be apprehended only through the first.¹²⁴⁵

We can see how, in this first phase, Ricœur's hermeneutics runs the risk of becoming too schematic and encapsulated. Why double meaning? Why must there be two meanings, and not more? For him, the important point to emphasize is that there is a dialectic which takes place between something that is shown, and something that is *hidden*:

It appears that their common element, which is found everywhere, from exegesis to psychoanalysis, is a certain architecture of meaning, which can be termed "double meaning" or "multiple meaning", whose role in every instance, although in a different manner, is to show while concealing. It is thus within the semantics of the shown-concealed, within the semantics of multivocal expressions, that this analysis of language seems to me to be confined.¹²⁴⁶

To be sure, Ricœur appears to be admitting the hypothesis that symbolic expressions have multiple meanings. A symbolic expression can in fact be a myth, or a dream, or poetry. What he seems to be taking for granted in this phase, is that the "apparent" meaning, the first-order meaning, is self-explanatory and thus "unitary". Thus even though different theories might reveal different aspects of the

¹²⁴⁵ Ricœur, "Existence and Hermeneutics" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, *op. cit.*, pp. 12-13.

¹²⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 12.

meaning of a given symbolic expression (such as, for instance, psychoanalysis or the critique of ideologies, or even deconstruction, which Ricœur, for obvious reasons, does not consider at this time) these different interpretations will all take place at the level of the *hidden* meaning, the meaning that they aim to decipher. Thus all this plurality of meanings, probably sometimes diverging among themselves, will be “concealed” meaning, needing the multiple canons of interpretation to be made accessible; and so they are redirected to their unity as “concealed meaning” and opposed to the “shown”, first-level meaning. This is why, I believe, Ricœur chooses to speak about “double meaning”. So what he is not taking into consideration is the possibility that the first-order meaning already contain within itself a myriad of possibilities, such as there will be, in the theory of reading of his mature hermeneutics, many possible “guesses” that will have to be verified or falsified.

The necessity to go beyond this first-order meaning, to not let oneself be satisfied with it, is therefore what inaugurates hermeneutics as such:

Interpretation is the work of thought which consists in deciphering the hidden meaning in the apparent meaning, in unfolding the levels of meaning implied in the literal meaning.¹²⁴⁷

Ricœur’s emphasis on the concept of symbol goes so far in the 1960s as to make interpretation and symbol correlative concepts: there is interpretation wherever there is multiple meaning, and it is in interpretation that the plurality of meaning is made manifest.¹²⁴⁸

There are obvious limits to this approach, and in a way, the much more complex and nuanced hermeneutic theory that Ricœur would put forward some years later is to a great extent able to explain much more than mere symbols. But the fact is that it is with this analysis of symbols that Ricœur spells out in a systematic manner for the first time the methodological and epistemological significance of the conflict of interpretations. Indeed, there is a whole program of investigation in the long quote below:

¹²⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹²⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

It is indeed notable that interpretation gives rise to very different, even opposing methods. (...) There is nothing surprising in this: interpretation begins with the multiple determination of symbols – with their overdetermination, as one says in psychoanalysis; but each interpretation, by definition, reduces this richness, this multivocality, and “translates” the symbol according to its own frame of reference. It is the task of this criteriology to show that the form of interpretation is relative to the theoretical structure of the hermeneutic system being considered. (...)

[philosophical hermeneutics] begins by an expanding investigation into symbolic forms and by a comprehensive analysis of symbolic structures. It proceeds by the confrontation of hermeneutic styles and by the critique of systems of interpretation, carrying the diversity of hermeneutic methods back to the structure of the corresponding theories. In this way it prepares itself to perform its highest task, which would be a true arbitration among the absolutist claims of each of the interpretations. By showing in what way each method expresses the form of a theory, philosophical hermeneutics justifies each method within the limits of its own theoretical circumscription. Such is the critical function of this hermeneutics taken at its purely semantic level.¹²⁴⁹

This long and complex quote has a lot to unpack; one cannot help feeling overwhelmed by the enormity of the task Ricœur is putting forward; and yet, this is precisely the task he sought to undertake, and which he did, or so I argue, undertake, to the extent of his capacities.

We have seen before how Ricœur wants to escape both skepticism and dogmatism. This is the reason why he seeks truth, but within the limits of a hermeneutic perspectivism that uses the conflict of interpretations to enlarge its horizons. Now it becomes even clearer how this works. No theory (in this case psychoanalysis, phenomenology, etc.) is completely true. None depletes the richness of phenomena – in this case, symbols. Some theories seem mutually contradictory, such as, say, psychoanalysis and the phenomenology of religion. But the fact is that *they are not* mutually contradictory. In fact, according to Ricœur, each of these theories discloses *a part* of the complex phenomena we are dealing with. As such, all these methods are, let us say, regionally valid. The structural method of decomposing meaning into signs and their synchronic relations is valid *within* structuralism, the analysis of dreams as a semantics of encrypted desire is valid *within* psychoanalytic theory, and so on. Each symbol, be

¹²⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 14-15.

it a myth, a poem, or a dream, constitutively contains the possibility of being “broken down”, “translated” in a plurality of different manners, each of which corresponding to a particular theory and a particular method. So, in a way, each method is justified. And as Ricœur would later claim, each is given the task of *explaining* more, so that we can understand better.

Thus, for instance, psychoanalysis will not explain all there is to explain in, for instance, religious myths and symbols, or in the structure of our conscience. So we cannot take it as being absolute. But it will disclose important features of all those phenomena, features that would not be rendered intelligible, if it were not for psychoanalysis and its method. Therefore, psychoanalysis and our traversal of it *enriches us*, in that my own understanding of myself and the world will never be the same after I am acquainted with it. This is, in fact, Ricœur’s stroke of genius. And this is what prepares him to what he sees as “the highest task”, i.e., that of “a true arbitration among the absolutist claims of each of the interpretations.”

Now, this is, in a nutshell, the core of Ricœur’s philosophy. It is true that he is only talking about symbols in this particular occasion. But this method is exactly what he had been, somewhat unconsciously, been practicing since the beginning of his philosophical investigations, and it certainly is the one he would continue to practice, even though with a degree of growing finesse, in the years to follow.

Concerning symbols, Ricœur would eventually arrive at the conclusion that “true symbols contain all hermeneutics” (“*les vrais symboles sont gros de toutes les herméneutiques*”¹²⁵⁰), another of Ricœur’s beautiful formulae. It means that great symbols – such as that of Oedipus – somehow have in them the potential to be interpreted differently and that it is therefore in this process that we find the reason for the existence of all these many interpretations. This is also the reason why we do not fall back into full-blown relativism. That is, not *all* theories are valid. In the explanation of someone’s behavior, say, astrology, will not have the same theoretical weight than does psychoanalysis. And this because there is some sort of objectivity in the phenomena we are dealing with that does not accept all explanations; this is why they must be validated.

As we have seen before, Ricœur also escapes relativism by grounding the

¹²⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 23.

several language games and the validation criteria of theories in different aspects of existence. This is why what he has in mind in this phase is really self-understanding, the beginning of a hermeneutics of the self, and of self-consciousness. This means that the main conflict taking place during this period is the one between hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics as recollection of meaning (whose emphasis is on the epistemological level) or, in a slightly different, reformulated manner, between the archeology or teleology of consciousness and meaning (whose emphasis is on the constitution of the self). The latter will be dealt with in chapter 4.3 below. But for now it is time to see in what manner Ricœur incorporates the “masters of suspicion” in his own theoretical framework.

4.1.2 – Hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics as recollection of meaning

We have seen above in part three how Ricœur, under the influence of Gabriel Marcel, often stressed the importance of “innocence”, or “naivety”, especially in the form of “secondary reflection”, which assumed the form of something like a “recollection” or “restoration”. Also, in the *Symbolism of Evil*, as we pointed out in the introduction to this part, Ricœur adopts a stance of “re-enactment” by means of “sympathetic imagination” of the experiences of evil contained in the symbols he undertakes to interpret. Besides, he often spoke of his own standpoint as standing somewhere between “critique” and “conviction”. Now, another notion that fits well in this semantic field is that of *faith*, understood not only in its religious sense, but also in a broader, secularized sense, as the strong adhesion to something. Something which might be the object of our strong evaluations, as Charles Taylor calls them. This might be belief in a value, or in an overarching goal. In fact, to continue borrowing Taylor’s insightful analyzes, this sort of personal adhesion might well be what, as it were, *provides meaning* to one’s life and sets the coordinates of the “moral space” within which we move.

Defining this problematic in terms of a polarity – or a conflict, if we insist on continuing exploring the depths of this notion – between critique and conviction indeed helps to get a clearer picture of it. We cannot overemphasize the importance of critique for philosophy. However, Ricœur argues, there is something irreducible in our adhering to an object of belief. In some cases, in what

is, to use a Kierkegaardian notion, properly *absolute* in one's life, belonging can be radical. This can take place in a state of first innocence – I believe in X, let us say, in God, or in the absolute adhesion to my country or its leader – that is properly pre-critical.

In a way, the critical position is not the natural position. Plato and Aristotle placed the beginning of philosophy in the moment of wonder. This means that reflection, and critique, are some sort of interruption in the natural course of things. The *Aufklärer*, of course, believed that philosophy was to eliminate once and for all this state of “innocence”, understood in a pejorative way and, through education – and yes, radical critique – bring about progress. As we have seen in parts one and two, from Kant onwards, and with a particular emphasis in Critical Theory, philosophy is more often than not equated with the exercise of critique. But the question thus begs to be formulated: are “critiques” and “convictions” necessarily incompatible?

For Ricœur the answer to this question is very straightforward: they are *not*. In fact, and this is a peculiar movement that he chooses to emphasize, there is indeed the possibility of a post-critical conviction, a post-critical faith. Which is to say, I already believed before I was given the possibility of exercising critique, I discovered critique and became a master of it; and however, even *after* critique, my conviction still stands. Perhaps it was transformed along the way, but it stands. Thus it is a post-critical conviction, or faith. So, in a way, critique is part of the *long route*. This is why critique is sometimes equated, in his works, with methodology. We will find a similar movement in his later little ethics of *Oneself as Another*, where innocent solicitude, after passing the test of critique – in this case, the formalization of the norm – comes back as *critical* solicitude.

This is not to say that critique is a secondary movement. In fact, it is fundamental. But what Ricœur seems to be emphasizing is that it does not have to be totally *destructive*, and this in spite of Heidegger's emphasis on *Destruktion* and Derrida's on deconstruction. A part of the prior meaning, and of the prior adhesion, can still survive even after the attacks of critique, which sometimes are ruthless. These brief introductory remarks should be enough for us to understand this particular dialectic of the 1960s, the one between hermeneutics as recollection of meaning and the crucial hermeneutics of suspicion. Its terms are very clearly stated in *Freud and Philosophy*.

Ricœur starts by defining hermeneutics as recollection of meaning:

The contrary of suspicion, I will say bluntly, is faith. What faith? No longer, to be sure, the first faith of the simple soul, but rather the second faith of one who has engaged in hermeneutics, faith that has undergone criticism, postcritical faith. Let us look for it in the series of philosophic decisions that secretly animate a phenomenology of religion and lie hidden even within its apparent neutrality. It is a rational faith, for it interprets; but it is a faith because it seeks, through interpretation, a second naiveté. Phenomenology is its instrument of hearing, of recollection, of restoration of meaning. “Believe in order to understand, understand in order to believe” – such is its maxim; and its maxim is the “hermeneutic circle” itself of believing and understanding.¹²⁵¹

As we can see, in this particular book, the fundamental conviction is faith, faith that has undergone the test of critique and survived, and phenomenology is the methodology that is capable of apprehending it. Because this is religious faith we are talking about, the method capable of grasping it is also the phenomenology of religion. It seems as if Ricœur could have chosen another method; that is, it is almost as if Ricœur is depriving phenomenology of its axiological neutrality and directly fusing phenomenology and hermeneutics. It would perhaps have been preferable to speak about the hermeneutic presupposition of the phenomenology of religion, rather than describing the “philosophic decisions” that “lie hidden even within its apparent neutrality”. Be that as it may, what we can see is that Ricœur’s depiction of the hermeneutic circle here makes the phenomenology as recollection of meaning the version of his hermeneutics that is closer to Gadamer’s hermeneutics. As we have already described, and will explore in full detail below, Ricœur’s mature hermeneutics wanted to integrate the critical aspect more fully. However, in 1965, it seems as if Ricœur is wanting to justify – really, to *give an account*, to provide reasons for, *logon didonai* – his adhesion to Christian faith. This is perhaps one of the goals of the book, not comparable to the most important one, namely, to make a philosophical assessment of Freud and psychoanalysis, but arguably a goal that acts as a personal motive. This seems to be supported by his later confession that he had made the traversal of psychoanalysis, and written this

¹²⁵¹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 28.

book, also as a “self-analyzis”.¹²⁵² And if he is to do this, he has to prove that Christian faith *makes sense*, that it is a plausible hypothesis, one that can be rationally defended and stood for, even after the most radical critiques it is subjected to – namely the Nietzschean critique.

Regardless of our personal stance towards the religious phenomenon in general, and irrespective of our faith or lack thereof in God or more particularly in Christ, I think that he is really successful in defending this claim. He succeeds in defending the plausibility of post-critical faith and this brings him once again very close to Charles Taylor’s project, namely that expounded in *A Secular Age*. But in order to do this, he had to insist on the possibility of a certain *transparence* of meaning, over and above the shadows of doubt and suspicion cast upon it. This certainly has its risks. In a way, it is a wager. Probably not everyone will be able to make the same wager, and even if Ricœur himself believed this, there were many times in which he attenuated this claim and submitted it to some sort of dialectic. But he certainly had the right to hold that claim and defend it in a rational manner.

He cites the phenomenology of religion of Leenhardt, Van der Leeuw, Eliade, and his own *Symbolism of Evil* as efforts pertaining to the phenomenology of religion and that led to this post-critical faith.¹²⁵³ Hence, the dialectic of literal meaning and hidden meaning would, in this case, depart from the symbol in order to reach the experience of the sacred.¹²⁵⁴ Ricœur’s claim is that in the case of the sacred, we can no longer practice a full *epoché*; rather, we have to believe that in the case of the sacred, that which is signified, that which is said, is said *to me*.¹²⁵⁵ According to him, this is what justifies confidence in language:

Implied in this expectation is a confidence in language: the belief that language, which bears symbols, is not so much spoken by men as spoken to men, that men are born into language.¹²⁵⁶

Ricœur would not always maintain the claim that there is a fundamental dialectic between suspicion and faith. Later, in *Oneself as Another*, he would replace faith

¹²⁵² Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 29.

¹²⁵³ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 28.

¹²⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

¹²⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

¹²⁵⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 29-30.

by attestation – always conserving the emphasis on the value of convictions – and even define truth by attestation; at that point, the fundamental dialectic is the one between suspicion and attestation. But he maintains that we need to have confidence in language. Without the confidence in language, so the claim goes, the intersubjective link is broken, because language is our most fundamental institution (language here understood in a very broad sense). This much should suffice to see how his perspectivism, which we alluded to so many times before, is not absolute. Rather, in this regard, Ricœur's choice is clear.

Be that as it may, his *Redlichkeit* forces him to submit his faith, and the confidence in language and the meaning of the sacred, to the critical test. And this is why he deems it fit to take very seriously the objections posed by the most serious enemies of this standpoint: the masters of suspicion. Ricœur usually mentions these “masters” as being Marx, Nietzsche and Freud, even though he sometimes also includes Feuerbach, or even Foucault in this lot. At first, he acknowledges the difficulty of finding a common thread in their projects:

Three masters, seemingly mutually exclusive, dominate the school of suspicion: Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. It is easier to show their common opposition to a phenomenology of the sacred, understood as a propaedeutic to the “revelation” of meaning, than their interrelationship within a single method of demystification. (...) “truth as lying” would be the negative heading under which one might place these three exercises of suspicion.¹²⁵⁷

It must be emphasized the vigor with which Ricœur strives to do justice to these three projects. He refuses not taking them seriously, and he mentions the all too common objections against them: Marx and the theory of reflex consciousness, Nietzsche's biologism and self-refuting perspectivism, and Freud's pansexualism. Ricœur wants to go beyond these hasty readings, and to take up seriously the challenge presented by these philosophies. What is thus this challenge? According to Ricœur, it consists in making problematic the transparency, or even the existence of consciousness itself:

If we go back to the intention they had in common, we find in it the decision to look upon the whole of consciousness primarily as “false” consciousness. They whereby take up

¹²⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 32.

again, each in a different manner, the problem of the Cartesian doubt, to carry it to the very heart of the Cartesian stronghold. The philosopher trained in the school of Descartes knows that things are doubtful, that they are not such as they appear; but he does not doubt that consciousness is such as it appears to itself; in consciousness, meaning and consciousness of meaning coincide. Since Marx, Nietzsche, and Freud, this too has become doubtful. After the doubt about things, we have started to doubt consciousness.¹²⁵⁸

Let me note in passing that even though the English translation of this text speaks about consciousness, as a way to translate the French “conscience”, what is at stake here is both consciousness and moral conscience, the two equivalents to the German *Bewusstsein* and *Gewissen*. It is important to keep this in mind, because, as is well known, Nietzsche’s attack assumes, among many other variants, the form of a genealogy of morality, and thus a diagnostic of the falsehood of *Gewissen*.

Another proof of Ricœur’s insistence in the seriousness and importance of this type of interpretation is his claim that Marx, Nietzsche and Freud were, above all, the inventors of a *certain type of hermeneutics*. In fact, if it were not for them, we would probably miss the very existence of something such as a *latent meaning*, and therefore we would also miss the opportunity to develop a *depth hermeneutics*. Let us pause for a moment and grasp the significance of this claim: without the hermeneutics of suspicion, a whole region of ourselves and of the world would have remained concealed. We would never have gone beyond the state of first naiveté. Now this is, in fact, a sort of *alternative history of hermeneutics*; one which starts not with Ancient exegesis and reappears with Schleiermacher and Dilthey; this is, one could say with a tad of humor, the *dark side* of hermeneutics; but what an interesting side it turns out to be. In fact, according to Ricœur, it is precisely in virtue of this characteristic that they go *beyond destruction* and, for those willing to incorporate their meaningful critiques without succumbing to their overwhelming weight, they are in a way very liberating indeed:

All three clear the horizon for a more authentic word, for a new reign of Truth, not only by means of a “destructive” critique, but by the invention of an art of *interpreting*. (...)

¹²⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 33.

Beginning with them, understanding is hermeneutics: henceforward, to seek meaning is no longer to spell out the consciousness of meaning, but to *decipher its expressions*. What must be faced, therefore, is not only a threefold suspicion, but a threefold guile. If consciousness is not what it thinks it is, a new relation must be instituted between the patent and the latent.¹²⁵⁹

Ricœur's diagnostic of the result of these three critiques and techniques is that they create a mediate science of meaning, irreducible to the immediate consciousness of meaning:

What all three attempted, in different ways, was to make their "conscious" methods of deciphering coincide with the "unconscious" *work* of ciphering which they attributed to the will to power, to social being, to the unconscious psychism. *Guile will be met by double guile.*¹²⁶⁰

And this "double guile" is none other than the process of demystification through deciphering itself. Thus this "hermeneutics" is not for the sake of itself. It has a project. A liberating project. So one of Ricœur's most perspicacious insights consists in claiming that "all three, however, far from being detractors of 'consciousness', aim at extending it."¹²⁶¹ Marx wants to liberate praxis; Nietzsche wants to increase our will to power; Freud wants the analyzed to enlarge his field of consciousness.¹²⁶²

In fact, if we come back to Ricœur's perspectivism, we can now grasp the full importance of the hermeneutics of suspicion: by inaugurating depth hermeneutics, and also by going against the grain, by questioning the evidence of self-consciousness, it is precisely *this* hermeneutics that pushes us more vigorously to enlarge our own perspective. Without it, we could not break the enchantment of the natural order. According to Ricœur, demystifying hermeneutics "sets up the rude discipline of necessity"¹²⁶³ which amounts to the lesson of Spinoza: "one first finds himself a slave, he understands his slavery, he

¹²⁵⁹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 34.

¹²⁶¹ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶² *Ibid.*, p. 35.

¹²⁶³ *Ibid.*

rediscovers himself free within understood necessity.”¹²⁶⁴

This last conclusion is objectionable. Ricœur claims that all there is to the hermeneutics of suspicion is this “ascesis of the necessary” and that it ultimately lacks the “grace of imagination” and the “upsurge of the possible”.¹²⁶⁵ I find this assessment very misleading. It might be correct to argue that there is an element of an “ascesis of necessity” in these three projects, and Ricœur captures this element very skillfully in Freud. We will see how in the next chapter. But to say that it lacks the power of the imagination, or of the possible, is not in itself accurate. Not to see in Nietzsche’s transvaluation of values, or in Marx’s project of emancipation, radical new possibilities put forward, in a way, by imagination, and even as the possible source of new normative orientations and ways of living, is stopping short of grasping all that there is in these philosophies.

Somehow, one can understand why Ricœur makes this assessment. He needs to do it, in order to create the epistemological space for his own choice, that of post-critical faith which, in the economy of *Freud and Philosophy*, would be the necessary complement and even the supersession of the hermeneutics of suspicion. However, it goes without saying that there are more creative possibilities for a hermeneutics of suspicion than what Ricœur seems to allow for in *Freud and Philosophy*.

I will note in passing a curious detail concerning the reception of this book. The fact is that, for better or worse, Ricœur’s depiction of the “hermeneutics of suspicion” became one of his most famous and longstanding contributions to philosophy. This has most certainly been unintended. Even though he ultimately wanted to overcome the hermeneutics of suspicion, and even though the book had a very harsh, unfair and even dishonest reception in Lacan and his circle¹²⁶⁶ which granted it a rather cold reception in Paris, the fact is that it had a lasting impact in the U.S.A. and elsewhere.

It thus seems as if many philosophers were very interested in Ricœur’s way of finding a similar characteristic in Marx, Nietzsche and Freud. This became an easy way to identify oneself with a particular style of exercising philosophy. And through a certainly partial and misguided assessment, Ricœur could risk be

¹²⁶⁴ *Ibid.*

¹²⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

¹²⁶⁶ On this very unfair reception, see François Dosse, *Les sens d’une vie*, chapter 29, “La levée de boucliers des Lacaniens” pp. 300-310.

seen as only the philosopher who coined the “hermeneutics of suspicion”. Alison Scott-Baumann dedicated an important book to dispelling this prejudice.¹²⁶⁷

In *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, namely in the chapter 4, “On the use and abuse of the term ‘hermeneutics of suspicion’”¹²⁶⁸ Scott-Baumann claims that Ricœur ultimately chose to uncouple suspicion from hermeneutics because hermeneutics itself already contains enough doubt. Suspicion added to hermeneutical challenges would go too far and become a corrosive force, whereby we “doubt all and we see through everything and everybody. This is a curse”.¹²⁶⁹ Here she argues for a moderate use of suspicion, balanced and appropriate to its goals. This is why, she claims, Ricœur almost completely abandoned the expression “hermeneutics of suspicion” in the early 1980s, whereas the exercise of “suspicion” continued at least until *Oneself as Another*. Ultimately, according to her, suspicion is to be understood as a Kantian limit-idea. We cannot be suspicious of everything, nor can we attain a foolproof knowledge of everything. Suspicion should act as a mechanism to control both our pretension to immediate knowledge and our will to know everything. It is thus useful for unmasking ideologies and forms of false consciousness. Suspicion itself can have two poles in dialectical tension with each other. The negative moment is useful when applied to subjective consciousness, so that it can destroy false idols and overcome their domination. However, the masters of suspicion did not provide the recovery, the affirmation that should balance the exercise of suspicion and when exacerbated, suspicion can become some sort of a permanently suspicious state of mind, whereby we can ultimately destroy ourselves.¹²⁷⁰ As such, suspicion should be handled with care.

My own assessment of the hermeneutics of suspicion will be more positive than Scott-Baumann’s. But she is definitely right in pointing out that there is much more than that in Ricœur’s philosophy, and that his definitive position – even in *Freud and Philosophy* – is way beyond the hermeneutics of suspicion.

In fact, Ricœur’s conclusion about the dialectic between hermeneutics as recollection of meaning and hermeneutics of suspicion is that both can be

¹²⁶⁷ See Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion* (London: Continuum, 2009) and my own book review of it in Gonçalo Marcelo, “Book Review of Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* vol. 2, no. 1 (2011) pp. 204-209, from which I borrow the following paragraph.

¹²⁶⁸ See Alison Scott-Baumann, *Ricœur and the Hermeneutics of Suspicion*, pp. 59-77.

¹²⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹²⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 71.

reconciled in the richness of true symbols.¹²⁷¹ And this, for him, means that a critique of religion as giving birth to idols and illusions must be put forward, so that a true comprehension of symbols, from textual sources, might happen. This also means, for Ricœur, abandoning the narrow point of view of the self-centered subject, and embracing the whole. That is, post-critical faith, the faith for whom idols have died, is a faith that goes through “non-narcissistic reconciliation”.¹²⁷² It is consenting to necessity, like he had already posited in *The Symbolism of Evil*. Ultimately, Ricœur invokes Freud’s reality principle. This principle forces the self-centered, narcissistic cogito to abandon its logic of desire and self-sufficiency. But he thinks that “reality” is more than what Freud allowed for; and so he posits that “love of Creation” is a hypothesis so valid as yielding to necessity. Because for the believer, Creation is there, has a meaning, is addressed to all of us, and can be loved. As such, no critique, no matter how dismantling it can be, will constitutively deprive the believer of the fundamental possibility of loving Creation.

Shortly after the publication of *Freud and Philosophy* Ricœur would express in a clear manner what he then understood as the relation between religion and faith. In “Religion, Atheism and Faith”¹²⁷³, a conference originally given in 1966 at Columbia University in New York, he spells out what his apology of a “postreligious faith”, by which he means a faith for a “postreligious age”, looks like.¹²⁷⁴ He clarifies that he is willing to accept the critiques put forward by an atheist standpoint, such as those of Nietzsche and Freud, but only up to some extent. He defines religion in harsh terms and this critique allows him to posit a faith that goes beyond religion. He chooses the topics of accusation and consolation as two of the main themes of religion and defines it as partly being anchored in these two intersubjective modes. This is seen as a weakness and as leading to the critiques of atheism.

I thus understand religion as a primitive structure of life which must always be overcome by faith and which is grounded in the fear of punishment and the desire for protection. Accusation and protection are, so to speak, the “corrupt parts of religion”, in the same

¹²⁷¹ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 543.

¹²⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 549.

¹²⁷³ See Ricœur, “Religion, Atheism and Faith” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 440-467.

¹²⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 440.

sense in which Marx referred to religion itself as the corrupt part of philosophy. It is here that atheism discovers its true justification and perhaps reveals its double signification as both destructive and liberating.¹²⁷⁵

Because religion has its corrupt parts, they must be criticized. Since these parts are illusions, and since they portray God in such and such a manner, a certain god (or a certain conception of a god) must die, namely, the god of metaphysics.¹²⁷⁶ Accordingly, the critiques addressed by the hermeneutics of suspicion to religion are partly welcome. For Ricœur, the destruction of “an onto-theology which culminates in the idea of a moral god, conceived as the origin and foundation of an ethics of prohibition and condemnation”¹²⁷⁷ is indeed an invaluable result of this critique.

Nonetheless, this is, for Ricœur, the opportunity to reestablish a more solid ground for faith; a faith without consolation, a “tragic” one even.¹²⁷⁸ According to him, this faith must renounce theodicy and a rational reconciliation between nature’s laws and human destiny. Nevertheless, it must also be able to put forward, as it were, a positive ontology.¹²⁷⁹ In this ontology, religion should be transformed in faith, through the mediation of atheism; the atheist critique would thus serve to purify faith, and to bring it closer to the origin. This purification, akin to some sort of ascesis, would liberate us from our desire for personal salvation. In fact, through it, we come to accept reality as it is. Not as a love of destiny but, to reiterate, as love of creation. As Ricœur puts it: “The love of creation is a form of consolation which depends on no external compensation and which is equally remote from any form of vengeance. Love finds within itself its own compensation; it is itself consolation.”¹²⁸⁰ According to him, this would be tantamount to a postreligious faith, and also a return to the Judeo-Christian kerygma. It is a kind of *amor fati*; this is not entirely consistent with the emphasis on human agency of his more practical works. But it is a matter of attitude and existential positioning. It is the hope that there is something good that can be loved in Creation, from the standpoint of the believer. Now, this thesis is not taking

¹²⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 441.

¹²⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 445.

¹²⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 447.

¹²⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 455.

¹²⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

¹²⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 467.

Ricœur's religious standpoint as a topic for exhaustive analysis. I am only mentioning it here because the content of faith and its relation with symbols is given an exemplary status in the application of hermeneutics as a recollection of meaning, in the recovery of the symbol of the Father¹²⁸¹, after the demise of its "idol". Also, the analysis of this particular case in Ricœur's hermeneutics allows us to grasp how he actually uses the dialectic between suspicion and recollection of meaning.

Ultimately, what is Ricœur's position in the conflict between hermeneutics as a recollection of meaning and hermeneutics of suspicion? Firstly, it must be understood that "recollection of meaning" goes beyond religious meaning, or the content of faith. That is, for Ricœur, this indeed applies to the assertion of the true meaning of the religious symbols such as the symbol of the Father. But hermeneutics as "recollection of meaning" can be understood as applying to wholly different contents, not only those that properly pertain to religious belief. Broadly speaking, hermeneutic as recollection of meaning is simply restorative hermeneutics, even something akin to what Honneth calls reconstruction, and Walzer interpretation, as we have seen in part two. As such, it can be applied to any cultural phenomenon that is open to interpretation; we can look at traditions, values, texts, beliefs, indeed at anything that pre-exists us and to which we can attribute different meanings, and analyze them using this type of hermeneutics. In a simplified manner, we can say that this is a positive kind of hermeneutical stance, that is, it is a position in which the interpreter *gives credit* to the cultural phenomenon that is being considered. Instead of trying to dismantle it, he or she rather chooses to *listen* to it.

Bearing this clarification in mind, I think it is safe to assume that Ricœur's ultimate position in this conflict is one in which he does not really *arbitrate* the conflict inasmuch as he actually positions himself in it. That is, he says that symbols allow for the conciliation of many interpretations, simply because they are so complex that many different takes on them are possible. And even if they might seem contradictory at first glance, Ricœur's enlarged standpoint allows him to give each interpretation its due. But insofar as hermeneutics of suspicion tends to be overarching, Ricœur ultimately tends to curb it. That is, it is

¹²⁸¹ On this topic, see specifically Ricœur, "Fatherhood: from Phantasm to Symbol" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 468-497.

seen as valid as a *means* to let hermeneutics as a recollection of meaning unfold. Suspicion is there to fulfill a role: that of helping us to abandon the naïve standpoint that is somehow filled with illusions. But suspicion is only allowed to go so far. It cannot be allowed to eventually destroy our standpoint and all our meaningful belongings. Therefore, his aim is to see what is there in the endpoint to be recollected. It is a somewhat Hegelian process, we might say, but with the cautions already stated in part one. As such, and to sum it up, in the conflict between hermeneutics as recollection of meaning and hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricœur recognizes the usefulness of the latter but ultimately sides with the former. I will come back to assess this choice in parts six and seven below.

This is a conflict *within* hermeneutics. However, in the 1960s Ricœur was still preoccupied with the epistemological status of hermeneutics as such and so he incurred in painstakingly long analyzes of other disciplines in order to be able to somehow pinpoint the position of hermeneutics towards them. Mainly, this was dealt with in an inclusive manner. In order to enlarge his perspective, Ricœur sought to appropriate other epistemological standpoints and their respective techniques in hermeneutics, while also highlighting the differences between his own hermeneutical standpoint and the angles of other disciplines. At each step, and exactly as he did with the hermeneutics of suspicion, Ricœur seemed to be saying to each of these positions: yes, I can go with you this far, but not any further. Not without relinquishing my overarching principles, something that I am not ready to do. This was evidently the case of the relation between his hermeneutics and the methodologies of structuralism and psychoanalysis.

4.1.3 – Hermeneutics and structuralism

Let us not forget how deeply the notions of hermeneutics, meaning, subject, etc., were being attacked in the Parisian intellectual scene of the 1960s. Ricœur was very attentive to these developments and at each time he was eager to debate them and, to the extent that there was a mediation to be operated, to include them in his own project.

This is certainly the case with structuralism. In *The Conflict of Interpretations* he dedicates three articles to the relation he envisages between

hermeneutics and structuralism, namely “Structure and Hermeneutics”¹²⁸², “The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem”¹²⁸³ and “Structure, Word, Event”¹²⁸⁴. In these articles, he puts forward some of the main claims of the first phase of his hermeneutics, such as: 1) hermeneutics is the interpretation of symbols; 2) symbols are cultural phenomena characterized by a structure of double meaning, one patent and the other latent; 3) it is the task of hermeneutics to force the latent meaning to become explicit. Nevertheless, he also clarifies in what ways structural analysis can be incorporated into hermeneutics, and in what ways hermeneutics aims to go beyond structuralism.

Ricœur is interested in incorporating structural analysis, as he will later also do with semiotic analysis, in his own hermeneutical standpoint. According to him, the goal of hermeneutics is understanding (a symbol, a text, etc.). But as he would later make clear, understanding can be aided by the processes of explanation, which are part of his long detour. Ricœur contends that the objectification of meaning is helpful, insofar as the human sciences (such as linguistics) are able to disclose hidden parts of meaning which a first, naïve approach would not be able to grasp on its own. As such, the goal of hermeneutics is to attain, as much as possible, a “full understanding”. This might include a diachronic approach on the genesis and evolution of the cultural object at stake. But according to Ricœur, the synchronic analysis spelled out by the structuralist approach are valid, provided that they do not pretend to exhaust the phenomena they tackle:

For the philosopher, structuralism’s *raison d’être* would then be to rebuild this full understanding, but only after having first stripped it, objectified it, and replaced it with structural understanding. Thus mediated by the structural form, the semantic base would become accessible to an understanding which, although more indirect, would be more certain.¹²⁸⁵

Hence, Ricœur is interested in including a “general theory of relationships” inside

¹²⁸² Ricœur, “Structure and Hermeneutics” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 27-61.

¹²⁸³ Ricœur, “The Problem of Double Meaning as Hermeneutic Problem and as Semantic Problem”, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 62-78.

¹²⁸⁴ Ricœur, “Structure, Word, Event”, in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 79-96.

¹²⁸⁵ Ricœur, “Structure and Hermeneutics”, p. 37.

his “general theory of meaning”¹²⁸⁶ and Lévi-Strauss’s observations about the savage mind are a good example of the way in which the synchronic approach was included as a segment of explanation within Ricœur’s hermeneutic theory. Ultimately, for Ricœur, structural analyzes are relevant, but the same does not apply to something like a “structuralist philosophy”.¹²⁸⁷ For him, the semantic analyzes always go beyond the syntactic relations. He argued many times that interpretations change through time, and that the unity of those significations is impossible to fully grasp in a single synchronic take.¹²⁸⁸ Structuralism, at least in its strong, allegedly self-sufficing version, appears to Ricœur as “a Kantianism without a transcendental subject, even an absolute formalism”.¹²⁸⁹ According to him, the type of intelligibility displayed by structuralism can only be applied to: “a) work on a corpus already constituted, finished, closed, and, in that sense, dead; b) establish inventories of elements and units; c) place these elements or units in relations of opposition, preferably binary opposition; and d) establish an algebra or combinatory system of these elements and opposed pairs”.¹²⁹⁰ In other words, this is how structuralism works. But there are so many meaningful realities to which this type of approach cannot be applied, that its domain of application is ultimately very narrow. Structural synchronic linguistics applies to states of a system captured as frames in a given moment. But the phenomenon of meaning, its historicity and its permanent reactualization go beyond that.

Furthermore, it goes without saying that one of Ricœur’s main contentions with structuralism and, we can even say, with all post-structuralist attempts to explain societies as mere loci of power-relations and so on, is the ease with which they sometimes seem to do away with subjects. And Ricœur, as we know, is halfway between the “exaltation of the cogito” and its humiliation and utter disappearance. His take on the self might be of a “conflicted self” as I will attempt to show below; but a self nonetheless.

There is thus a conflict between hermeneutics and structuralism, insofar as both aim to somehow deplete the phenomena they want to describe. At some point, when meditating upon this phenomenon of conflict, he actually defines the

¹²⁸⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 39.

¹²⁸⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 45.

¹²⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 46.

¹²⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

¹²⁹⁰ Ricœur, “Structure, Word, Event”, p. 79.

task of philosophy as that of *arbitration among conflicts of interpretation*:

I like to grant philosophy the role of arbitrator, and I have previously attempted to arbitrate the conflict of several hermeneutics in modern culture.¹²⁹¹

However, the metaphor of “arbitration” might be misleading, insofar as Ricœur does not really – or at least not *always* – attempt to put himself in a detached situation. Even if he strives to attain some sort of enlarged standpoint, as I have been arguing, his is not a “view from nowhere”. I mentioned above how in the conflict between hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics as recollection of meaning he tends to favor the latter. The same can be said about the conflict between hermeneutics and structuralism. Even if he claims wanting to give structuralism its due, and even if he speaks of hermeneutics and structuralism as being two different “strategic levels”¹²⁹² it goes without saying that *his* standpoint is the standpoint from which the two levels are grasped, and since it is a hermeneutical standpoint... *ergo*, hermeneutics encompasses structuralism, and not the other way around. If these are two different strategic levels, hermeneutics is the more fundamental. And this is in fact seen as *the* striking feature of hermeneutics. For the Ricœur of the 1960s hermeneutics is tantamount to the conflict of interpretations. Speaking about the forces and weaknesses of hermeneutics he mentions: “the conspicuous weakness of delivering hermeneutics over to the warfare of rival philosophical projects. But this weakness is also its strength, because the place where language escapes from itself and escapes us is also the place where language comes to itself, the place where language is *saying*.”¹²⁹³

At first glance, it might seem that Ricœur is ambiguous about the broken character of hermeneutics, describing it as both “a force and a weakness”. But this is in fact, or at least it seems, part of his strategy of reappraising hermeneutics. Indeed, we can discern in it both a descriptive and an evaluative claim. Ricœur states the broken character of language and hermeneutics as a *fact*: we have no totally unified theory of language or philosophical system, all we have is a

¹²⁹¹ Ricœur, “The Problem of Double Meaning”, p. 62.

¹²⁹² *Ibid.*

¹²⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 67.

fragmentary experience, fragmentary takes on language and rival theories of interpretation. This might, on a first approach, seem like a weakness, but it is actually an advantage because it brings with it a pluralistic perspectivism which allows us to go beyond fast, narrow and superficial explanations. Ultimately, no closed off, systematic explanation is able to deplete language because meaning is actualized in speech. Terms are polysemic and it is their use in different contexts that renews meaning. This is why Ricœur's later discovery of Wittgenstein's *Philosophical Investigations* and the whole movement of ordinary language philosophy would prove to be so decisive for him. For Ricœur, indeed, polysemy is constitutive of the functioning of *all* language, and this is one of the reasons why the conflict of interpretations is inescapable.¹²⁹⁴ For this reason, he would develop semantic analyzes in detail, very inspired by Benveniste's discourse theory, and ultimately also drawing very much on speech act theory.

In the last analysis, Ricœur's main objection towards structuralism is its temptation to consider language as a closed and isolated system. Indeed, to reiterate, Ricœur not only connects semantic analyzes to existence, but he also strongly asserts that language always refers back to reality (even though not necessarily empirical reality) and this is why it can meaningfully describe our life and the world. Language expresses the multiple dimensions of being; because language is open to change, but also intimately tied to reality, what it does is to disclose the multilayered dimensions of being. And to prove this is also, in a way, to make sure that hermeneutics ultimately wins over structuralism in this conflict.

4.1.4 – Hermeneutics and psychoanalysis

Hermeneutics also assumes a fertile relation with psychoanalysis. To be sure, Ricœur does not pay much attention to psychoanalytical practice, at least in his early writings. Nor to Post-Freudian psychoanalysis in its many forms. Jung, Lacan, and so forth, are not the object of much attention. And for all the bitter polemics with Lacan and his circle, Lacan's unfair reception and so on, the truth is that Ricœur confesses he "didn't understand a thing"¹²⁹⁵ of what Lacan said in his seminar. Consequently, he chooses to mostly concentrate on the *philosophical*

¹²⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 72.

¹²⁹⁵ Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, p. 72.

significance of Freud, more than in anything else. In *Freedom and Nature* Ricœur already mentioned the unconscious and Freudian psychoanalysis, but in a somewhat pejorative way. Now, after the *Symbolism of Evil* and the beginning of his hermeneutic turn, he felt that he had somehow to confront himself with Freud and the other masters of suspicion, which led him, to reiterate, to the discovery of the inescapable character of the conflict of interpretations. Ricœur's writings on Freud and psychoanalysis are spread throughout three books: some early articles in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, some later articles recently republished in *Écrits et conférences 1: autour de la Psychanalyse*¹²⁹⁶ and the excellent *Freud and Philosophy*. Through his assessment of psychoanalysis's mixed character, somehow halfway between energetics and hermeneutics, he finds in it an excellent tool for the assessment of the inescapability of conflicts in our psychic life. I will leave a more thorough assessment of these loci of conflict for chapters 4.2 and 4.3 below. But I will now tackle the way in which Ricœur understands psychoanalysis's relation with hermeneutics as such.

I will start by mentioning the core and originality of Ricœur's approach, which we can find in the article "A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud".¹²⁹⁷ In this article Ricœur clarifies his stance towards Freud's work. He claims that what he does is more than a reading; being a philosophical interpretation, it entails taking a position towards the philosophical significance of Freud. It is a discourse of a "philosopher who thinks from Freud – that is, after, with, and against him".¹²⁹⁸ From the start, he announces the core of his standpoint: for him, Freudian discourse is a mixed discourse, in that it combines questions of meaning and questions of force. This results in a binding of force and meaning in what Ricœur calls a *semantic of desire*.

For Ricœur, as we shall see in greater detail in chapter 4.3 below, Freudian psychoanalysis ultimately provides the model for a regressive self-understanding, taken from the repressed memories of our childhood, our traumas and so forth, in what he dubs an "archaeology of the subject". But, again, he finds this type of approach both useful and insufficient. Hence, he proposes to read

¹²⁹⁶ Ricœur, *Écrits et Conférences 1: Autour de la Psychanalyse*, edited by Catherine Goldenstein and Jean-Louis Schlegel (Paris: Seuil, 2008).

¹²⁹⁷ Ricœur, "A Philosophical Interpretation of Freud" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 160-176.

¹²⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 160.

Freud with a sympathetic intention. In what seems to be an application of the recollection of meaning to the reading of Freud's own work, he talks about doing an "architectonic reconstruction" in which one's stance towards Freud is not one of repetition but reconstruction.¹²⁹⁹

Why does he choose to concentrate on Freud's written words, rather than in the analytical situation itself? Because he has a fundamentally optimistic hermeneutical standpoint; that is, for him there is a somewhat a priori communicability of experiences whereby "what appears in the analytical relationship is not radically different from what someone who has not been analyzed can understand."¹³⁰⁰ Hence, Freudian psychoanalysis is interesting for *us*, its potential readers, insofar as it has something to tell *us*, something potentially universal regarding human experience and the constitution of consciousness. And from that wager results the decision to treat him philosophically: "a philosopher, as a philosopher, is capable of understanding psychoanalytic theory and even in part the psychoanalytic experience."¹³⁰¹

And what aspect of more or less universal human experience is it capable of grasping? Precisely the phenomena of desire, their interpretation and potential energetic repression they can undergo. Ricœur would find in Freudian psychoanalysis, and namely in the semantics of desire, a model to explain both the micro and the macro level, that is, both the inner workings of the psychic life of the subject and the overall movement of culture and civilization (more or less like Plato, who finds a model to depict both the human soul and the life of the city) in what is dubbed an "interlacing of desire and culture".¹³⁰²

However, Ricœur's assessment of psychoanalysis and its diagnoses is somewhat different according to the level it applies. At the micro level of the subject, and to reiterate, Ricœur wants to limit its overarching explanatory pretensions. He posits that psychoanalysis has a "breach" a "dissonance" between the experience it discovers and the conceptual analysis it proposes. Therefore, he claims, the vocation of philosophy is not only to arbitrate the plurality of interpretations, but "the plurality of experiences as well".¹³⁰³ Accordingly, for

¹²⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 162.

¹³⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 163.

¹³⁰¹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 164.

¹³⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 166.

Ricœur, the language of force must be inserted within the framework of a vocabulary of meaning, and the discoveries of psychoanalysis concerning the human psyche must be inserted within the framework of a reflective philosophy and a philosophy of the subject. Because the conflicts of repressed desire can be viewed differently, and even partially overcome, if grasped from the standpoint of the effort to exist¹³⁰⁴, following Spinoza and Nabert.

That is, the conflicts detected by psychoanalysis exist and its diagnosis is, to some extent, valid. But they are not to be seen as so fundamental as the effort of to subject to exist and thrive:

Finally, the concrete reflection makes sense only insofar as it succeeds in asking anew the Freudian question of the unconscious, the id, of instincts and meaning, in the promotion of the subject of reflection.

We must hold onto this, for it is the bolt which keeps everything together and by which this interpretation stands or falls.¹³⁰⁵

Ricœur's conclusion is that after Freud, our take on consciousness can no longer be the same. But this does not mean that consciousness does not exist or that we cannot articulate our desires or exercise free will. The result is what he will call a "humiliated cogito", but a cogito nonetheless. As he puts it, "in this terrible battle for meaning, nothing and no one comes out unscathed."¹³⁰⁶ But *someone* comes out after all.

Ultimately, Ricœur's strategy in the conflict between hermeneutics and psychoanalysis is akin to the one adopted in the assessment of the relation between hermeneutics and structuralism. But this time around his interpretation is even more assimilatory. Hermeneutics aims to encompass structuralism while at the same time going beyond it, whereas psychoanalysis itself becomes a *type* of hermeneutics; more precisely, a certain strand of the hermeneutics of suspicion, as we have seen. In that, it is essential, but also fundamentally limited for Ricœur.

Be that as it may, he seems to find a very meaningful application for it as a hermeneutics of culture, which is not without consequences for social philosophy. Thus in "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary

¹³⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 170.

¹³⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 171.

¹³⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 176.

Culture”¹³⁰⁷ Ricœur finds it liberating that psychoanalysis “breaks out of the limited framework of the therapeutic relationship between the analyst and his patient and rises to the level of a hermeneutics of culture”.¹³⁰⁸ Ricœur goes so far as to see in this a specifically social task for hermeneutics; in interpreting culture in such and such a manner, hermeneutics (in this case a very specific type of hermeneutics, that is, the one inspired by psychoanalysis) is supposed to be able to *change it*. This is of the utmost importance:

Psychoanalysis takes part in the contemporary cultural movement by acting as a hermeneutics of culture. In other words, psychoanalysis marks a change *of* culture because its interpretation of man bears in a central and direct way *on* culture as a whole. It makes interpretation into a moment of culture; it changes the world by interpreting it.¹³⁰⁹

This direct mingling of hermeneutics and praxis is fundamental in Ricœur’s social philosophy, and it is vigorously defended, over against the Marxist reduction of cultural phenomena to superstructural ideology, in the 1970s, in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia, Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* and elsewhere. To interpret differently, claims Ricœur, is already a step towards a transformation of the world.

In what comes down to psychoanalysis as a hermeneutics of culture, Ricœur adopts a somewhat maximalist approach; he pretends to show that psychoanalysis is “an interpretation of culture *as a whole*”.¹³¹⁰ Ricœur’s claim is a perspectivistic one, in the sense I explained before. Psychoanalysis is a *total* interpretation but only “in one genus”¹³¹¹; that is, it is only a *point of view*. As a point of view, it aims to be encompassing, i.e., a perspective on the whole. But in order to discover its perspectivistic character one has to step outside of it, as it were. And this is, again, what Ricœur is claiming to do. The merit of psychoanalysis, according to him, is that “psychoanalysis disrupts traditional divisions”¹³¹² because it applies its single, overarching models with its

¹³⁰⁷ Ricœur, “Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture” in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 121-159.

¹³⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹³⁰⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹³¹² *Ibid.*

topographic, economic and genetic depictions to separate domains and claims to explain them all with the help of these models. As such, it is a perspective on humanity and our behavior as a whole. But it is also “limited because it does not extend beyond the validity of its model or models”.¹³¹³ And with this assessment of both the validity and limitation of psychoanalysis, I think we find the core of Ricœur’s model of a conflict of interpretations and its arbitration.

I will not go into the details of Ricœur’s appropriation of Freud in this section; I will rather leave a more detailed account of Ricœur’s traversal of psychoanalysis for the next chapter. But let me mention the way Ricœur detects in Freud’s *The Interpretation of Dreams*¹³¹⁴ the positing of a unity between literary creation, myths and dream distortion¹³¹⁵ which prepares him to tackle culture as a unitary phenomenon later on. He takes the dialectics between “aesthetic seduction” and “religious illusion” and the backdrop of the topographic-economic interpretation as structuring Freud’s analyzes of culture, and this in works such as *Totem and Taboo*¹³¹⁶, *The Future of an Illusion*¹³¹⁷ and *Moses and Monotheism*.¹³¹⁸ According to him, we must read the partial and “genetic” interpretations against this topographic-economic background, otherwise we will lose the unity of perspective provided by the psychoanalytic take on culture.

According to this model, then, civilization and culture are not really distinguished. Culture implies coercion and instinctual renunciation.¹³¹⁹ So society is uncovered, for Freud, as the locus of a major conflict between instincts and prohibition and culture is thus at pains to mitigate it through a triple quest:

Lessening the burden of instinctual renunciation, reconciliation with the inescapable and compensation for sacrifice.¹³²⁰

Thus, notes Ricœur, for Freud this inescapable tension and the search for solutions that allow us to make it treatable, define culture *itself*. As cultural beings, we are inherently unsatisfied, and psychoanalysis attempts to answer why and to

¹³¹³ *Ibid.*

¹³¹⁴ See Sigmund Freud, *The Interpretation of Dreams* (London: Hogarth Press, 1953).

¹³¹⁵ Ricœur, “Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture”, p. 123.

¹³¹⁶ Freud, *Totem and Taboo* (London: Routledge, 2001).

¹³¹⁷ Freud, *The Future of an Illusion* (London: Penguin, 2004).

¹³¹⁸ Freud, *Moses and Monotheism* (London: Hogarth Press, 1968).

¹³¹⁹ Ricœur, “Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture”, p. 125.

¹³²⁰ *Ibid.*

provide solutions for it.

Ultimately, in *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*¹³²¹ Freud introduces the instinct of destruction embodied in *Thanatos* and the way it can trump *Eros* as a source of our desires. At a social level, the death instinct unfolds as a sort of *anticulture*¹³²² which is progressively revealed at biological, psychological and cultural levels. With this claim we come to the human species' struggle for life amid civilization. In *Civilization and its Discontents*¹³²³ culpability comes into play as a result of this essential conflict between *Eros* and *Thanatos*, while *Totem and Taboo* gives an account of moral coercion.

Ricœur accepts the pertinence of these analyzes, up to a certain point. He also comes to see in Freud the meaningful diagnosis of our psychic conflicts through the economic model, and the way the repression of instincts expresses itself in our psychopathological everyday life. However, in a typical move, Ricœur claims that many times what we find in the objects analyzed by psychoanalysis is not only the expression of our conflicts, but also of their putative solutions. This is blatant in Ricœur's assessment of Freud's interpretations of art and myths, such as those concerning the Oedipus myth or the cultural creations of Shakespeare or Da Vinci.

If these works are creations, it is because they are not simple projections of the artists' conflicts but are outlines of their solutions. The argument will be that the dream looks backward toward childhood and the past, while the art work is an advance on the artist himself. It is a prospective symbol of personal synthesis and of the future of man rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts. This is why the art lover's understanding is not a simple reliving of his personal conflicts, a fictive realization of the desires awakened in him by the drama, but a participation in the work of truth which is realized in the soul of the tragic hero.¹³²⁴

This interpretation is consistent with Ricœur's dialectical correction of Freudian archaeology with Hegelian teleology that he presents in *Freud and Philosophy* and which we will see in more detail in the next two chapters.

¹³²¹ Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle* (Ontario: Broadview, 2011).

¹³²² Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture", p. 128.

¹³²³ Freud, *Civilization and its Discontents* (London: Penguin, 2002).

¹³²⁴ Ricœur, "Psychoanalysis and the Movement of Contemporary Culture", p. 140.

Ultimately, Ricœur seems to have a perspectivistic take on the perspective of psychoanalysis itself. He states “everyone bears the responsibility of *situating* psychoanalysis in his own vision of things”.¹³²⁵ His own take, as we already know, consists in placing Freud alongside the other “masters of suspicion” and of limiting their pretensions by positing the possibility of a restorative hermeneutics and even a phenomenology of the sacred. In this article, using another metaphor, akin to that of arbitration, Ricœur mentions that he wants to “coordinate the diverse styles of contemporary hermeneutics”¹³²⁶ which means, at this point in time, to recover the possibility of a phenomenology and a hermeneutics of the symbols ready to accept and explicate their meaning instead of only unmasking them.

In the last analysis, Ricœur takes Freud to be a tragic thinker. According to him, the “Freudian revolution is that of diagnosis, lucid coldness, and hard-won truths”.¹³²⁷ It is also, in its own way, and as I have described in another context, describing Kant’s philosophy, an ascesis. With the difference being that here, at least if we follow Ricœur’s reading, there is no morality whatsoever. Freud wants to constitute a science in its own right, capable of holding its own and explaining human consciousness and behavior. And this, for Ricœur, is actually one of Freud’s strengths:

This is the misunderstanding: Freud is hearkened to as a prophet, while he speaks as an unprophetic thinker. He does not herald a new ethic but rather changes the consciousness of those for whom the question of ethics remains open. He changes consciousness by changing our knowledge of consciousness and by giving it the key to some of its deceptions. Freud can change our ethic in the long run because he is not a moralist for the immediate future.¹³²⁸

As such, and to sum up Ricœur’s reading of Freud at this point, he sees in Freudian psychoanalysis a meaningful depiction of inner and outer conflicts, and he sees Freud as proposing no immediate solution or them, and no positive ethics. But he does depart from Freud in his contention that symbols (artistic, religious or

¹³²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 142-143.

¹³²⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 146.

¹³²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹³²⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 154-155.

any other meaningful symbol) are not only the display of our conflicts, but also of our ways of dealing with them and finding solutions to them. Freud's difference in comparison with Hegel is thus that while both are tragic thinkers, Hegel does posit a possible consolation, while Freud apparently offers none. But because he does change the way we perceive consciousness, the world, and our behavior in it, his own ascesis of truth is perhaps capable of refiguring (to use a word that Ricœur would explicitly put forward in the 1980s) our own world vision. We are thus left with the task of incorporating the psychoanalytical standpoint in it, and to see how it changes our perspective. The great lesson that we learn from Freud then, and Ricœur seems to take up this lesson, is that there is an irreducible locus of conflict in our life. That conflict is inescapable in human interaction.¹³²⁹ Should there be any reconciliation here, it would be none other than consenting to necessity, as in the *Symbolism of Evil*. But what necessity? In this case, it is consenting to the hard truth that there is a tragic residue in human life and so that some conflicts are inescapable. This seems to be the ultimate lesson that psychoanalysis has for Ricœur:

Finally, it is the *lucid awareness* of the necessary character of conflicts which is, if not the last word, at least the first of a wisdom which would incorporate psychoanalytic instruction. In this way Freud renewed not only the sources of the tragic but "tragic knowledge" itself, insofar as it is the reconciliation with the inevitable.¹³³⁰

So even though Ricœur contends that in our own creations and in symbols we find the projection not only of the conflicts but also of the solutions to them, he acknowledges that maybe conflict in the form of human interaction is inescapable; or at least that there might be *situations* in which it is indeed inescapable. And to this he calls the tragic of action, which would play a fundamental role in *Oneself as Another*. Freud's hermeneutics of culture is thus seen as providing us with a key lesson, and even though it is not to be taken as a hermeneutics depleting social, psychic or moral reality, it is a hermeneutics useful to teach us the discipline of necessity.

¹³²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

¹³³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 158.

4.1.5 – Hermeneutics and phenomenology

The last of the methodologies I need to mention due to its relation with hermeneutics is phenomenology. Ricœur dedicates articles to outlining the relation between these two standpoints in both phases of his hermeneutical production, namely in *The Conflict of Interpretations* and *From Text to Action*. I will allow myself to very briefly recall the main traits of the way in which he envisions this relation in both phases, before coming back to his take on psychoanalysis in the next chapters. With this interaction between hermeneutics and phenomenology I will finish the assessment of the main standpoints in tension that overlap in a fertile manner in Ricœur's thematic treatment of the conflict of interpretations.

Firstly, it must be stated that phenomenology comes into play in *The Conflict of Interpretations* mostly to help Ricœur frame the topic of the subject, or selfhood, and the threats that other hermeneutical styles, like structuralism and semiology, pose to it. I mentioned before how in this book Ricœur recovers Nabert and his style of reflective philosophy in order to better ground the hermeneutic problem in existence and the subject. In two other texts of the same section, "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject"¹³³¹ and "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology"¹³³² Ricœur explicitly spells out the standpoint of a hermeneutics of the self (or, as he sometimes puts it, a "hermeneutics of the 'I am'"¹³³³). In "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject" Ricœur examines Heidegger's attacks on the Cartesian *cogito* and positively assesses his connection between hermeneutics and existence, that his, Heidegger's insistence that *Dasein* is a questioning being, and that it is in our connection to Being and in the disclosure of that connection through (hermeneutical) questioning that we come to define ourselves. For Ricœur, it is important to emphasize that for Heidegger the ego who is implied in the question is not posited as being certain of itself¹³³⁴ and also that it is as an "I am" and not as an "I think" that this question involves me.¹³³⁵ This is important for Ricœur's own alternative between the philosophies of

¹³³¹ See Ricœur, "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 223-235.

¹³³² Ricœur, "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, pp. 236-266.

¹³³³ Ricœur, "Heidegger and the Question of the Subject", p. 223.

¹³³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹³³⁵ *Ibid.*

the subject and the philosophies without subject. He would spell this out more clearly later, but the main intuitions were already there with him in the 1960s.

Ricœur's main difference in relation to Heidegger, as stated before, is that Ricœur prefers to take the "long detour" of the mediation through signs. And he sees hermeneutics as being constituted by this detour. Sometimes he tries to find in Heidegger a confirmation of this claim:

Dasein is ontically the closest to itself, but ontologically farthest. And it is in this distance that the "I am" becomes the theme of a hermeneutics and not simply of intuitive description.¹³³⁶

His conclusion in this article is that the destruction of the *cogito* as absolute is also the opportunity to put forward a hermeneutics of the self and its insertion in Being.¹³³⁷ Moreover, Heidegger's insistence on authenticity and on one's "ownmost possibilities" is also seen by Ricœur as a valuable insight for depicting what a "true" ipseity could amount to. An ipseity which, as would later become clearer, is only attested to, but never completely sure of itself.

In "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology" which is perhaps the more encompassing article of the *Conflict of Interpretations*, the one which better sums up Ricœur's position at this point in time, he offers a concise view of the different hermeneutic styles he is juggling with. And he also shows how not to lose sight of the subject amid all this putative confusion of competing claims. From the outset, Ricœur clarifies that something like a unified philosophy of the subject has always been a mirage, and that even in reflective philosophy the conflict of interpretations, whether it was acknowledged or not, always played a part:

The philosophy of the subject, it is said, is in danger of disappearing. So be it; but this philosophy has always been challenged. *The* philosophy of the subject has never existed; rather, there have been a series of reflective styles, arising out of the work of redefinition which the challenge itself has imposed.¹³³⁸

¹³³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹³³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 234.

¹³³⁸ Ricœur, "The Question of the Subject: The Challenge of Semiology", p. 236.

Ricœur thus mentions a Socratic *cogito*: “Look after your soul”, as well as the ones defined by Augustine (The inner man), Kant (The “I think” which accompanies all my representations), as well as the more known versions of Descartes, Fichte and Husserl.¹³³⁹ To these we could certainly add the more contemporary depictions of Charles Taylor, MacIntyre, obviously Ricœur and even the later Foucault. Shortly after this assertion concerning the plurality of reflective styles, he again puts forward one of his methodological claims. When defining what reflective philosophy should do, he is actually describing what he himself does with his conflict of interpretations:

By this challenge, reflective philosophy is invited, not to remain intact by warding off enemy assaults, but rather to take support from its adversary, to ally itself with that which most challenges it.¹³⁴⁰

He then recalls the main attacks on the subject brought about by structuralism and psychoanalysis, and which I already reconstructed in their main traits. He also puts forward his vision according to which language is never for the sake of itself. Over against the claim of dissolving the subject but assimilating some of the main observations brought about by these dissenting methods, Ricœur ultimately comes to the conclusion that while it can be certain that I exist, the question of *what* I am remains open.¹³⁴¹ This vocabulary would be slightly revised in *Oneself as Another*, where I attest *who* I am (and not *what* I am); however, *who am I* in the objective sense (that is, my defining traits and characteristics) is also an open-ended question, capable of revision; this is, I believe, the spirit of what Ricœur is claiming already in the 1960s.

The ultimate conclusion to which Ricœur arrives is that a nuanced and, as it were, enlarged perspective can only be taken up by philosophy. In this case, a philosophy of the subject that would have absorbed and traversed the critiques of both psychoanalysis and semiology:

The philosophy of the subject that holds a future in not merely one which will have undergone the test of psychoanalytic criticism and linguistic criticism; it is the philosophy

¹³³⁹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹³⁴¹ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

which will be able to project a new receptive structure for including in its thought both the lessons of psychoanalysis and those of semiology.¹³⁴²

Eventually, in the 1960s Ricœur aims at attaining such a position through a particular mix of hermeneutics and reflective philosophy, that is, of a *cogito* mediated by signs¹³⁴³ who is only capable of discovering him or herself through cultural interpretation. Now, this perspective would be fine-tuned in the second phase of Ricœur's hermeneutics, the one presented in *From Text to Action*, and in which he replaces signs by texts as the main units of his hermeneutical stance. In this mature phase, the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics is also thematically analyzed in a more careful way. As such, and before delving more deeply into his traversal of psychoanalysis, allow me to conclude this chapter with these precisions on the relation between phenomenology and hermeneutics.

The first part of *From Text to Action* is precisely called "For a Hermeneutical phenomenology" and it is composed of texts whose programmatic character is once again evident. In them, Ricœur sets out to define the task of hermeneutics¹³⁴⁴; in order to do so, he chooses to begin with a description of the way in which his method draws from both phenomenology and hermeneutics, as well as the meaningful differences and similarities between the two standpoints. Thus in the text "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics"¹³⁴⁵ Ricœur spells out this connection. He presents two main claims: 1) Hermeneutics is not a negation of phenomenology, only of one of its variants: Husserlian idealism; and 2) over and above the opposition there is a mutual imbrication between phenomenology and hermeneutics such that one cannot be properly understood without the other.¹³⁴⁶

Why is hermeneutics opposed to Husserlian idealism? Ricœur mentions several reasons: a) even though Husserl posited scientificity as the ideal of an ultimate foundation this foundation is put in check by the ontological condition of understanding¹³⁴⁷; b) he wanted a return to intuition but understanding must always be mediated by interpretation; c) the *cogito* itself can be doubted; d)

¹³⁴² *Ibid.*, p. 262.

¹³⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 265.

¹³⁴⁴ See Ricœur "The Task of Hermeneutics" in *From Text to Action*, pp. 53-74.

¹³⁴⁵ See Ricœur, "Phenomenology and Hermeneutics" in *From Text to Action*, pp. 25-52. On this very important connection, see also Michel Renaud, "Fenomenologia e Hermenêutica: O Projecto Filosófico de Paul Ricœur" in *Revista Portuguesa de Filosofia* 41/4 (1985): 405-442.

¹³⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 25-26.

¹³⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 29.

subjectivity is not to be considered as unquestionable and primal. In fact, the primal object of hermeneutics is the text and its interpretations; e) consequently, subjectivity is not to be found at the beginning but rather at the end of the enquiry, because only after the mediation of interpretation can it be established.

However, even if there is, according to this depiction, a conflict of interpretations between phenomenology and hermeneutics, Ricœur ultimately thinks that a *correct* interpretation of phenomenology is able to sufficiently ground hermeneutics. So, for him, the similarities are to be found in the prevalence accorded to meaning, in the dialectics between belonging and distancing, and in the emphasis put on the pre-linguistic layers of experience. Finally, there is a similarity which is noted by Ricœur only in passing, when commenting on Husserl, but which I think is really decisive for his method and that can be used to describe an aspect tied to his approach to philosophy:

The “style” of the interpretation is characterized by the “infinite work” involved in unfolding the horizons of present experiences. Phenomenology is a meditation “indefinitely *pursued*” because reflection is overwhelmed by the *potential* meanings of one’s own lived experience.¹³⁴⁸

Indeed “work”, like “task” are two words that Ricœur often invokes when describing key concepts in his philosophy. The energetic metaphors are thus very important in his books, even if these are, paradoxically, energetic terms used in interpretation (showing that the degree of imbrication between energetics and hermeneutics is even greater than he admitted). But the fact that the work of interpretation can be “unending” because the “potential meanings” could become overwhelming is, I think, an aspect which was taken very seriously by Ricœur. And from this is derived not only the long detour but also the multiple crisscrosses between opposing poles, so characteristic of the conflict of interpretations.

To sum up this section, I think we can say that the way in which Ricœur assesses phenomenology amid the conflict of interpretations is twofold: on the one hand, Ricœur considers phenomenology (and namely Heidegger’s version of hermeneutical phenomenology) as an interesting ally in the conflict against structuralism and psychoanalysis, a conflict in which what Ricœur aims is at

¹³⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 50.

saving the subject, albeit a radically transformed and less pretentious one. On the other hand, Ricœur plays a role in the conflict of different interpretations of phenomenology's role and method and he considers that the only valid interpretation of phenomenology is the one that lets itself be pervaded by hermeneutics and its essential postulates of interpretation, textual mediation and so forth.

To some extent, after the *Conflict of Interpretations* Ricœur would dedicate less time and energy thematically analyzing the notion of conflict. Nonetheless, with all he had written before, and with this course of conflict already being halfway, he probably thought he had by this time already sufficiently established its epistemological and methodological bases. Consequently, he could move on to other problems. Nevertheless, and from what I expounded before, I think it is fair to assume that these claims were taken for granted and Ricœur just kept on using his method of the conflict of interpretations in all his other books. The rest of this course of conflict, that is, the remaining chapters of this part and all the next part of this thesis will therefore continue to follow its thread.

4.2 – Unconscious Conflict: the Traversal of Psychoanalysis

4.2.1 – Conflicts in our psychic life: *Freud and Philosophy* and the early texts

I already mentioned the influence of Freud and psychoanalysis in Ricœur quite a few times. More specifically, I explained in some detail how Ricœur wants to assess the philosophical significance of Freud, how he considers psychoanalysis to be a hermeneutics of culture and how he sees in Freud a master of suspicion, but ultimately wants to counterbalance the importance of suspicion with an emphasis on hermeneutics as recollection of meaning. Now, in this brief chapter, I will pick up the missing threads of Ricœur's assessment of Freud and psychoanalysis. My approach will be chronological and thematic. Firstly, I will mention the aspects of Ricœur's early take on psychoanalysis that have not been highlighted before in this thesis, and namely the loci of conflict he uncovers with Freud. Lastly, in an even shorter second section of the chapter, I will briefly assess the later take on psychoanalysis that Ricœur puts forward, one in which the psychoanalytical practice is more seriously taken into account.

"Consciousness and the Unconscious", a conference originally written in 1960 and later republished in *The Conflict of Interpretations* was, as I mentioned before, Ricœur's first systematic article on Freud. In it, some of the main claims of his assessment of the philosophical significance of Freud are already put forward. Let us not forget that in this year Ricœur had published the second volume of his *Philosophy of the Will*. As such, from the outset of the article, Ricœur acknowledges the "considerable shock" that constitutes for him, who had been "trained in phenomenology, existential philosophy, linguistic or semiological studies, and the revival of Hegel studies" the encounter of psychoanalysis.¹³⁴⁹ And why? Because most of these strands, and more notably of which phenomenology, existential philosophy and Hegelianism, strongly asserted the existence and pertinence of consciousness – as well as Kantianism, to which Ricœur was, to reiterate, very close.

With Freud, even more than with Marx and Nietzsche, Ricœur uncovers the possibility which in a way denied all his previous philosophy, i.e., "the lie of

¹³⁴⁹ Ricœur, "Consciousness and the Unconscious", *op. cit.*, p. 99.

consciousness and consciousness as a lie”.¹³⁵⁰ Taking this possibility into account in a serious manner is thus tantamount to admitting that “*The question of consciousness is just as obscure as that of the unconscious.*”¹³⁵¹ And this because consciousness itself becomes some sort of dialectical reality. If it cannot be depicted as something which we can grasp with unfaltering certitude, and if this has all the unwanted consequences of lack of clarity concerning our motives and drives, an eventual loss of freedom and even maybe its correlative incapacity to assume responsibility for one’s actions, than its status itself must be transformed. Hence, according to Ricœur, “Consciousness is not a given but a *task*.”¹³⁵² Ricœur many times repeats Freud’s formula *wo es war, soll ich werden*, i.e., roughly translated, where “it” was, *I* must become. This is taken to mean that the hypothesis of consciousness is not at definitely lost in Freudian psychoanalysis. The first impact of Freud’s theory might be terrifying in that we discover that we are really not the masters of ourselves. Nevertheless, through psychoanalytical technique and interpretation there is the possibility of reconquering through work – and more notably of which *Durcharbeiten*, the “working-through” or *perlaboration* – what in traditional theory seemed like a point of departure, i.e. consciousness.

So we can say that for Ricœur, what applies to the theory of the self is what also applies – at least to some extent – to consciousness. Instead of *Bewusstsein* (consciousness as a status, almost an entity) what we have is a process of *Bewusst werden*, of becoming a consciousness through the process of self-discovery promoted by the hermeneutics of the self. So the subject, and consciousness, are only attained (or better yet, they are *never* fully grasped but only permanently *reinterpreted*) after the long mediations and detours. One important mediation is evidently, for Ricœur, that of the meaningful teachings of Freudian psychoanalysis.

That said, Ricœur envisages the relationship between consciousness and the unconscious as a conflict which needs to be turned into a dialectical relationship without, however, falling back into what Ricœur fears the most, namely, that his standpoint be taken as a “mere eclecticism”:

¹³⁵⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵¹ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 108.

We must enter into the most complete opposition between consciousness as history and the unconscious as fate if we wish to acquire the right to overcome this opposition and understand the identity of the two opposed systematics, one of which is a synthesis of consciousness, the other an analysis of the unconscious. But neither their opposition nor their identity gives us the right to eclecticism. Three cups of the unconscious, two tablespoons of preconsciousness, and a pinch of consciousness is not our recipe at any price. Eclecticism is always the enemy of the dialectic.¹³⁵³

This wish to escape eclecticism leads Ricœur to make the most serious reading of Freud he is able to produce; and it accounts for his reading of almost all of Freud's writings in German.

He thus distinguishes between what amounts to "technique" and what escapes it in Freud's psychoanalytical interpretations.¹³⁵⁴ Psychoanalysis is a technique insofar as it "arises from a therapeutical maneuver which is constituted as a profession".¹³⁵⁵ However, for Ricœur, it also contains both an "art of interpretation" and a speculative theory.¹³⁵⁶ But this "art" and this speculation are marked by what is in itself a conflictual situation. The unconscious, as it is presented in Freudian theory, is elusive. The effort of self-comprehension is met by resistance and its mechanisms. Therefore psychoanalysis is, in a sense, a way of hermeneutically struggling against the energetic concealing of the inner depths of our psychic life: "the art of interpretation should itself be considered as part of the art of handling resistances (...) Freud continually repeats that the struggle against resistance is arduous".¹³⁵⁷

As such, psychoanalysis always deals with what are inherently conflictual situations. And Ricœur recalls Freud's caution on the way interpretation and the analytical technique must be conducted, in order not to aggravate these conflicts and decrease the likelihood of cure.¹³⁵⁸ We should not forget that the patient suffers; and Ricœur, who was always very attentive to human fragility, finds in this another motive of interest in psychoanalysis. The conflicts with which we are

¹³⁵³ *Ibid.*, p. 119.

¹³⁵⁴ See Ricœur, "Technique and Nontechnique in Interpretation", pp. 177-195.

¹³⁵⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 178.

¹³⁵⁶ *Ibid.*

¹³⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 179.

¹³⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 180.

dealing here can become incapacitating such as in the case of neurosis, etc. Consequently, it is also as a subtle *art for dealing with conflicts* that Ricœur recovers psychoanalysis, even though he does not explicitly states this in these words.

This claim finds perhaps a confirmation in Ricœur's apology of Freud, the "liberator", the *Aufklärer*. That is, behind consciousness as disguise lies deformation and conflict of instincts, transfer, and so forth. But one of the consequences of psychoanalysis will be to "force" people, as it were, to recognize these conflicts (and this not really in the analytical relation, but more broadly applied to the general insights on the human brought about by psychoanalysis and their social effects). Accordingly, Freud states that "they will have to be honest, confess to the instincts that are at work in them, face the conflict, fight for what they want, or go without it".¹³⁵⁹ And he even speaks about "psychoanalytic enlightenment" to describe this effect. And Ricœur actually praises this: psychoanalysis as a phenomenon of disoccultation and the possibility of salvation through psychoanalysis.¹³⁶⁰ To reiterate, this position by Ricœur is not very different from the one Habermas adopted in the 1970s. Indeed, Ricœur really insists on psychoanalysis being a kind of hard discovery of truth and reconciliation with reality. Psychoanalysis is a project of liberation¹³⁶¹, and if that means accepting our conflicts – or partially solving them – so be it. This is explicitly stated:

It seems to me that we can legitimately say that psychoanalysis, when it is well understood and thought through, frees man for projects other than that of domination.¹³⁶²

And in this interesting article, Ricœur already partially anticipates what would later become his anthropology of the capacities; he tells us that one of the results of psychoanalysis will be to make us capable of doing two things; restoring our ability to speak and our ability to love. And he asserts that they are nothing but two aspects of the same project.

Insofar as psychoanalysis is able to go beyond neurosis and to recognize

¹³⁵⁹ Quoted by Ricœur, *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹³⁶⁰ *Ibid.*

¹³⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 192.

¹³⁶² *Ibid.*

our true desires, inasmuch as it is capable of establishing a semantics of desire that is more than the simple energetic result of tensions and conflicts, it eventually make us capable of speaking again, and perhaps even of articulating a more authentic desire. Accordingly, Ricœur's hope is that this art of interpretation will also allow us to provide a new orientation to our desire, which is nothing more than a new power to love.¹³⁶³ Why is it that Ricœur expresses this, and what does this hope amount to? It is not that conflicts will be eliminated. But being able to recognize and articulate them, as well as to articulate our true desires will perhaps provide a reconciliation with nature. Perhaps even an authenticity of our desire. Or a reeducation of it, as Ricœur sometimes says. But either way, by helping us to understand better our desires, it will have provided us an invaluable service.

These elements would be put forward in a more systematic approach in *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur's true confrontation, assessment and recovery of Freudian psychoanalysis and its philosophical dialectics with Hegel. I already said enough about the masters of suspicion, the conflict of interpretations and psychoanalysis as a global interpretation of culture, so I do not need to repeat the aspects of it which also make their appearance in this book. Instead I will just provide a rapid overview of the book and mention the main instantiations of conflict it calls our attention to, before quickly assessing the later writings and, in the next chapter, delve more deeply into the kernel of the book and the conflicted self, torn between archeology and teleology.

The organization of *Freud and Philosophy* has a Kantian backdrop. It is divided in a "Problematic" an "Analytic" and a "Dialectic". That is, it is as if Ricœur wanted to spell out the reason why he became interested in Freud in the first place (the conflict of interpretations, the torn character of language, the connection between hermeneutics and reflective philosophy), and then prove the seriousness of his reading by traversing and depicting as objectively as possible Freud's works, in order for later put forward his own interpretation of it. A long detour indeed.

In a way, Freud comes to sum up for Ricœur the demystification of all the masters of suspicion and thus to be the major representative of one of the sides in conflict. He assumes this:

¹³⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 194.

In the beginning, Freud is one combatant among many; in the end, he shall have become the privileged witness of the total combat, for all the opposition will be carried over into him.¹³⁶⁴

Hence conflict appears at the fundamental energetic level. Our psychic life is made up of conflicts of instincts, and we have to catch a glimpse of the topography of our psychic life, and all the mechanisms of distortion. However, since Ricœur contends that his book is a succession of readings, or angles, on Freud's work, and since his main overarching thesis on Freud is that his theory has the status of a semantics of desire – in his own words “the energetics implies a hermeneutics and the hermeneutics discovers an energetics”¹³⁶⁵, what he tries to do is to *make sense* of these conflicts.

In his *Analytic*, Ricœur systematically unveils the conflictual aspects pervasive in Freud's theory. For instance, when analyzing *The Interpretation of Dreams*, he highlights the “violence done to the meaning”¹³⁶⁶ which is a result of the mechanisms of censorship and distortion. The “hidden” is not only masked; it is distorted, as it were. Substitution is also a trick. This is why interpretation is almost always a (strenuous) work, and why it must be indirect. He explicitly states that through the process of repression, the psychical apparatus “receives force and conflict”.¹³⁶⁷

Ultimately, Ricœur concentrates on the concept of *Vorstellungsrepräsentanz* or simply *Repräsentanz* put forward in the discussion of Freud's “Papers on Metapsychology”. According to Ricœur, this mechanism that will be the one able to provide a link between force and meaning, consciousness and the unconscious, “body and soul” as it were.¹³⁶⁸ Because a purely economic (or energetic) standpoint makes no sense, if totally separated from the representable and the sayable. Otherwise, we would fall short of a “psychology”.¹³⁶⁹

Likewise, in the chapters on Freud's take on culture and civilization,

¹³⁶⁴ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 60.

¹³⁶⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 65.

¹³⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹³⁶⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹³⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 135 ff.

¹³⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 150.

conflict plays an important role. After all, what is culture for Freud if not the “great conflict between civilization and the instincts”¹³⁷⁰ exemplified in a striking manner in the Oedipus myth and the prohibition of incest? The assertion of the inherent conflictuality of human beings in society and culture also provides Ricœur with the opportunity to make a first approximation between Freud and Hegel:

Because the adult remains subject to the infant he once was, because he can lag behind and regress, because he is capable of archaism, conflict is no mere accident which he might be spared by a better social organization or a more suitable education; human beings can experience entry into culture only in the mode of conflict. Suffering accompanies the task of culture like fate, the fate illustrated by the Oedipus tragedy. Possibility of aberration and necessity of repression are correlative; cultural renunciation, similar to the work of mourning mentioned above, holds the place occupied by fear in the Hegelian dialectic of Master and Slave.¹³⁷¹

Ricœur is very explicit in the above passage. Entry into culture always entails conflict and this partly because the archaic still survives in us. The prohibition and the desire to transgress it will always maintain us in an unstable position.

The problem is always of how to deal with the conflict between instincts and the obstacles to them, how to deal with desire. Desire can conflict with reality and thus illusion is born. Ricœur mentions how Freud takes religious beliefs as being delusional in this sense.¹³⁷² Ricœur, as I mentioned, ultimately rejects this account and wants to recover the possibility of post-critical faith. But escaping from reality is taken, as it were, as a pathological phenomenon; and he takes into account the major conflict between the pleasure principle and the reality principle such as it unfolds in Freudian theory¹³⁷³ and the ultimate polarity that is assumed between *Eros* and *Thanatos* (which eventually leads to the feeling of culpability that occupied Ricœur for so long). For Freud, as we have seen above, this polarity is tantamount to the struggle of human beings for existence, insofar as culture is

¹³⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 191.

¹³⁷¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 196-197.

¹³⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹³⁷³ See chapter one of part three “The Pleasure Principle and the Reality Principle”, pp. 261-280.

supposed to rein in the fundamental conflictual aggressiveness of *Thanatos*¹³⁷⁴, to control the instinct of destruction. And psychoanalysis is supposed to play a role in this.

But these are all conflicts detected by psychoanalysis and Ricœur recognizes these diagnoses as accurate for the most part. However, a second level of conflictuality in the book lies in the conflicts and tensions which Ricœur detects in Freud's take itself, such as that between a "mythology of desire" and the "science of the psychical apparatus"¹³⁷⁵ or indeed, more broadly put, between energetics and hermeneutics. And for him, philosophy's role, at least in the 1960s is precisely that of arbitration.¹³⁷⁶ This is all the more important for him given the fact that he states that the core of Freud's concepts gravitates on the model of conflict¹³⁷⁷ most notably of which "structural conflicts" like those between id, ego and superego.¹³⁷⁸ Ultimately, Ricœur's epistemological standpoint in this book will hinge in the frontier and intersection between psychoanalysis and phenomenology, as his section on dialectics elaborates. I will skip the details of this position, because the next chapter will say enough about consciousness-formation at this point of Ricœur's philosophy. Suffice it to say for now that for Ricœur the "place" of energetic discourse is at the intersection of desire and language.¹³⁷⁹ Consequently, the energetic metaphors are of a mixed nature. If, on the one hand, they are more than energetic, on the other hand they also bear witness to something more than a relationship between meaning and meaning.¹³⁸⁰ They are, as it were, a bridge between two different realms. One consequence of this is that in psychoanalytical practice, the art of interpretation is part of the art of handling the patient's resistances.¹³⁸¹ And after *Freud and Philosophy* the emphasis turns precisely towards the significance of this practice.

¹³⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 305.

¹³⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 313.

¹³⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 342.

¹³⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 349-350.

¹³⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 370.

¹³⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 395.

¹³⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 394.

¹³⁸¹ *Ibid.*, p. 408.

4.2.2 – Psychoanalysis after *Freud and Philosophy*: the turn towards psychoanalytical practice

In his Postface to *Écrits et conférences 1: autour de la psychanalyse* Vinicio Busacchi emphasizes that the turn towards analytical practice can be understood against the backdrop of a new way at looking at what could be called the “psychoanalytical experience” and which entails the abandonment of some of Freud’s own claims.¹³⁸² This can in part be explained, as Busacchi contends, by the shift in Ricœur’s hermeneutic theory, from an emphasis on symbols to an approach based on texts and paying special attention to narrativity.

Now, if Ricœur slowly gathers the threads that would later allow him to make fully explicit his notion of “narrative identity” it goes without saying that psychoanalysis plays a meaningful role in his rethinking of the processes of narrative self-construction.¹³⁸³ In fact the psychoanalytical relation slowly appears as a model for the intersubjective relation, one in which the life that searches for a story that is sometimes structurally impeded is able to overcome its pathological condition. Through the psychoanalytical relation the patient comes – or at least can come – to see cure and recognition of oneself as being possible. To linguistic exclusion psychoanalysis brings the possibility of re-symbolization.¹³⁸⁴ Furthermore, adds Ricœur, desire has a dialogical structure, and this reinforces his Hegelian reading of Freud, already presented in *Freud and Philosophy*. Over against Freud’s somewhat monological account, Ricœur emphasizes that desire is intrinsically dialogical. As such, if we want to find a good depiction of dialogical desire in psychoanalysis, he argues, we are not to find it in Freud’s theoretical accounts but rather in psychoanalytic therapy itself, where it is always through the mediation of another that desires come to be articulated.

In these sets of articles, no less than in *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur finds in psychoanalysis a way to deal with conflicts. He constantly recalls that psychoanalysis is to be understood as a means to struggle against the patient’s resistances, even if it risks deepening his or her conflicts.¹³⁸⁵ In a very significant

¹³⁸² Vinicio Busacchi, Postface to Paul Ricœur, *Écrits et conférences 1*, p. 307.

¹³⁸³ See Ricœur, “La vie: un récit en quête de narrateur” in *Écrits et conférences 1*, pp. 257-276 and “Le récit: sa place en Psychanalyse”, pp. 277-290.

¹³⁸⁴ See Ricœur, “Le récit: sa place en Psychanalyse”, p. 281.

¹³⁸⁵ Ricœur, “La question de la preuve en Psychanalyse”, in *Écrits et conférences 1*, p. 41.

article, called “Le *Self* selon la Psychanalyse et selon la philosophie phénoménologique”¹³⁸⁶ Ricœur assesses the contributions of Heinz Kohut to psychoanalysis and its take on the self. More specifically, he uncovers how there is a metaconflict between Freud’s and Kohut’s analyzes over the fundamental Oedipus conflict. According to Kohut this latter conflict, stemming from sexual instincts, is secondary in relation to a more fundamental conflict revolving around the relations between the self and selfobjects.¹³⁸⁷ Unlike Freud, Kohut postulates a unified self, and the relation to others as being driven by empathy. Likewise, contrary to Freudian psychoanalysis, Kohut’s theory of the self is seen by Ricœur as contributing to the classical discussions of the conflicts between subjectivity / objectivity and understanding / explanation.¹³⁸⁸ In the first debate, Kohut compares the self psychology to microphysics, where the observer is him or herself part of the observed object. In the second one, Kohut, like Ricœur, distinguishes between phases of understanding and phases of explanation. In these latter phases, the analyst contributes to the patient’s process of *working through* with the objective elements and renewed interpretations he spells out. As it is clear, Kohut’s analyzes come close to both hermeneutics and critical theory, in their claims about the closeness and mutual implication of subject and object. The emphasis on the dependence of the self upon approbation (even if in this case these are objects we are talking about) brings Kohut also close to recognition theory. As Ricœur emphasizes, for Kohut, we have to be able to have esteem for ourselves in order to recognize esteem unto others.¹³⁸⁹ This is akin to what Honneth calls positive relations to self.

Like he had done before for Freud, Ricœur proposes to read Kohut with comparison with Hegel and the model of struggle. Contrary to Hegel, Kohut insists that struggle is not a generative source of our psychic life but rather the result of an early “acquired pathology” stemming from a failed relation between

¹³⁸⁶ This article was originally published in English as “The Self in Psychoanalysis and in Phenomenological Philosophy” in *Psychoanalytic Inquiry* 6, 3 (1986): 437-458 but I only had access to the French version, in *Écrits et conférences I*, pp. 139-166. On this conflict of the notions of self in psychoanalysis and phenomenology, and the way Heinz Kohut’s approach can meaningfully intersect with Ricœur’s, namely through the insertion of empathy in his theory, see Michel Dupuis, “L’empathie comme outil herméneutique du soi. Note sur Paul Ricœur et Heinz Kohut” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 1, 1 (2010): 9-20.

¹³⁸⁷ Ricœur, “Le *self* selon la Psychanalyse et selon la philosophie phénoménologique”, p. 140.

¹³⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 150-151.

¹³⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

the self and selfobjects. To this malaise, empathy will be the main cure.¹³⁹⁰ Ricœur notes that it is the topic of empathy that brings phenomenology and Kohut's theory of the self close to one another.¹³⁹¹ He also invokes, like he did in *Time and Narrative*, the challenges to the postulate of the unified self brought about not only by Nietzsche but also by the literary experimentation of Proust or Joyce (to which we could evidently add Pessoa as an even graver example). His solution to this problem at this point in time is to make of alterity a constitutively ethical dimension, which brings him to the vicinity of Levinas.¹³⁹² But he does not completely drop the Hegelian model of the generative force of struggle and conflicts. This will become very clear in the next chapter of this thesis.

Likewise, if Ricœur sees in psychoanalysis a way to deal with these conflicts, he also sees in the psychoanalytical model of cure a possible model for the critique of ideologies, following Habermas. Even if he refuses to accept the analogy *tout court* as we have seen before (because we cannot really cure a society like we cure a patient) he at least accepts that the critique of ideologies brings a degree of self-knowledge to societies inasmuch as Freudian psychoanalytic theory and practice can bring one such self-knowledge to a patient. Again, this is close to what Habermas calls a "depth hermeneutics". These are taken as degrees of explanation that help bring about a better understanding of the self, in what he calls an "hermeneutical arc" in the second stage of his hermeneutical theory. Ultimately, self-understanding or self-interpretation, amid this hermeneutical arc, are taken as a limit-idea.¹³⁹³

Thus psychoanalysis comes to be fully integrated in hermeneutics, as one of its methods in the search for truth / interpretation. Its criteria and proofs are said to resort to the whole network of interconnected aspects it puts forward: theory, hermeneutics, therapy and narration.¹³⁹⁴ That is, to clarify, psychoanalysis is taken as a sort of hermeneutics¹³⁹⁵ with a mixed epistemology halfway between a semantic and a naturalist approach. Nevertheless, its results entail all the different approaches here listed. Sometimes Ricœur even argues that Freud does not sufficiently take into account the semiotic nature of the analytic experience and

¹³⁹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 157.

¹³⁹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 159.

¹³⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 161.

¹³⁹³ See Ricœur, "Psychanalyse et herméneutique", in *Écrits et conférences I*, p. 103.

¹³⁹⁴ Ricœur, "La question de la preuve en Psychanalyse", p. 62.

¹³⁹⁵ See Ricœur, "Psychanalyse et herméneutique", p. 87.

that the type of discourse adequate to that experience is one made up of images, bordering the so called “pictorial language” and using visual presentations.¹³⁹⁶

In a nutshell, and as Busacchi argues, the slight shifts in Ricœur’s take on psychoanalysis after *Freud and Philosophy* are closely tied together with the shifts in his philosophy. I will leave a more detailed account of the hermeneutical theory of the 1970s and 1980s for the last three chapters of this part. But first, and because I already mentioned his first attempts at devising a theory of the self, I will need to address the fundamental conflict which for the Ricœur of the 1960s, constitutes the self.

¹³⁹⁶ Ricœur, “Image et langage en Psychanalyse”, in *Écrits et conférences I*, p. 105 and p. 128.

4.3 – The Conflicted self, Part One: Archaeological vs. Teleological Consciousness

It is in the third part of Ricœur's *Freud and Philosophy*, the “dialectic” – which is the most creative part of the book – that the fundamental rift in consciousness becomes fully apparent. The fact that he chooses to call this part of the book “dialectic” attests that he does not want to stop at a simple “antithetic” between hermeneutical styles. Indeed, he thinks that both the hermeneutics of suspicion, at this moment mainly represented by Freud and encapsulated in the archeological model, and the now called hermeneutics of the teleological discovery of meaning, represented by Hegel's phenomenology, reveal essential features of our consciousness – and thus of ourselves. Ricœur reiterates that he does not have a single, overarching hermeneutic theory capable of totally reconciling language to itself.¹³⁹⁷ So conflict remains inescapable. But in his own dialectical solution he hopes to have attained a greater degree of clarity about the self and culture through his double reading of Freud and Hegel.

4.3.1 – Freud's archeological model

Concerning Freud, Ricœur starts by noting the usefulness of his critiques of the cogito. In order to discover ourselves hermeneutically we must go beyond immediate consciousness. That is, we must experience “dispossession” and this, for him, is what justifies Freud's naturalism.¹³⁹⁸ Therefore, this is not to be taken as a reduction *to* consciousness but as a reduction *of* consciousness¹³⁹⁹, which is to be regained, as we know, in the detour through meaningful symbols. As such, and in a first approach, such an undertaking is considered as a sort of anti-phenomenology leading to a “highly mediated reflection”.¹⁴⁰⁰ Ultimately, as we have seen above, this is postulated as a task. And how and why is such a task

¹³⁹⁷ Ricœur, *Freud and Philosophy*, p. 343.

¹³⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 422.

¹³⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 424.

¹⁴⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 425.

possible? Because, Ricœur argues, “the unconscious is homogeneous with consciousness; it is its relative other, and not the absolute other”.¹⁴⁰¹

Eventually, the process is confirmed by the status of psychic “reality”. For Ricœur, this reality “only exists as a ‘diagnosed’ reality”;¹⁴⁰² that is, the reality of the unconscious is relative to the operations that give it meaning. Otherwise, the topic and the relation of forces would remain blind and no “cure” would be possible. Ricœur’s conclusion is then that there is a (diagnosed) reality of the id, but only relative to an ideality of its meaning, inasmuch as we only reach meaning at the end of the analytic experience.¹⁴⁰³

Ultimately, this discovery brings him to the notion of “archeology” as the archi-concept encapsulating the significance of Freudian methodology. Ricœur states that he sees Freud’s metapsychology as “an adventure of reflection”¹⁴⁰⁴ that discovers a “wounded Cogito” (*cogito blessé*), one that “sees its original truth only and through the avowal of the inadequacy, illusion, and lying of actual consciousness”.¹⁴⁰⁵ Freud’s economic point of view is thus a type of discourse that is appropriate to what he decides to call an “archeology of the subject”.

However, it must be stated that for Ricœur almost *all* Freudianism is a kind of archeology, not only of the subject but also of culture. Allow me to quote a slightly longer passage in order to show how Ricœur sees in this archeological function that unveils our desire and its masks the fundamental kernel of Freudianism:

Insofar as ideals and illusions are the analogues of dreams and neurotic symptoms, it is evident that any psychoanalytic interpretation of culture is an archeology. The genius of Freudianism is to have unmasked the strategy of the pleasure principle, the archaic form of the human, under its rationalizations, its idealizations, its sublimations. Here the function of analysis is to reduce apparent novelty by showing that it is actually a revival of the old: substitute satisfaction, restoration of the lost archaic object, derivatives from early fantasies – these are but various names to designate the restoration of the old in the features of the new.¹⁴⁰⁶

¹⁴⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 430.

¹⁴⁰² *Ibid.*, p. 436.

¹⁴⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 439.

¹⁴⁰⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 446.

Accordingly, in the “return of the repressed”, Ricœur argues, Freud finds a model that can be equally applied to the human psyche or to human culture. The archaic, its concealment and its return are movements found both in inner and outer nature, so to speak.

Desire masks itself. And if we want to find it, we have to dig deep in our soul, in order to understand it. Ricœur’s strong assertion, as we know, is that desire is turned towards language. It “wishes to be expressed; it is in potency to speech”.¹⁴⁰⁷ It is both the unnameable and the potency to speak. However, even if this archeological approach serves to dispossess ourselves, to teach us the hardness of life, the truth about ourselves in desire, pleasure and its repression... it itself possesses, or so Ricœur argues, its limitations. Namely, the truth about ourselves is not to be found only in the deep recesses of our hidden and sometimes shameful desire. Sometimes, desire does not come from deep down. Sometimes it pushes us forward and its truth cannot help but to be discovered... at the end. So Ricœur turns to the teleological aspect of our consciousness.

4.3.2 – Hegel and the teleological process of consciousness-formation

Now, this is an important twist of Ricœur’s argument. Freud uncovers, so to speak, our *archê*. But for Ricœur “in order to have an *archê* a subject must have a *telos*.”¹⁴⁰⁸ Consequently, all the precedent analysis is just a preparation for the inclusion of this last piece of the puzzle; without it, the mapping of our consciousness would remain incomplete. It is not enough to posit the inadequacy of immediate consciousness or to find desire at the root of our existence. One must also grasp, argues Ricœur, the workings of the process of *becoming conscious* through which we come to *appropriate meaning*. That is, we must go beyond the mere denunciation of meaning as illusory. At the end of *Freud and Philosophy*, the teleological process of consciousness formation and meaning appropriation are therefore the privileged path that recollection of meaning assumes.

However, this too is a mediation and there is no absolutely “certain” or “reinforced” subject at the end. Indeed, Ricœur argues that even in this process there is a certain dispossession insofar as the “symbols” that will reveal the

¹⁴⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 457.

¹⁴⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 459.

meaning of consciousness for us are actually the Hegelian figures of consciousness presented in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*, which I need not recall here, since this process was discussed at length in part one of this thesis. That is, the emphasis is on “spirit”, broadly put, and not in the individualistic existence of *my* consciousness. Between the two abstractions of the “unconscious” and “spirit” Ricœur thus operates the fragile mediations which will constitute our somewhat torn, conflicted and yet existent self. Furthermore, it is in this dialectic that he finds find the true complementarity between the conflicting hermeneutical styles, and hence also of the role of language, philosophy and the interpretation of culture.

His claim is, curiously enough, that Freud and Hegel refer to the same phenomena, but that they choose to address them, as it were, in an inverted order, through different perspectives. And this even though he acknowledges that they are “two different continents” and that all we can do is to find some analogies between their theories. However, they both depart from life and desire, and if Hegel acknowledged that this is surpassed in spirit and truth and Freud refused to do so, Ricœur argues that we can find such a dialectic also in Freudianism.¹⁴⁰⁹

He chooses to depict what Hegelianism brings to Freudianism as a process of adulthood. That is, if Freud discovers *behind us*, as it were, in the depths of ourselves, some of the hidden motivations of our action, if he finds in the young child the seed of the adult behavior, Hegel on the other hand through the supersession of the figures of spirit shows us how amid the process of struggle and recognition we become adults and attain self-consciousness.

Man becomes adult, becomes conscious, by assuming these new forms or figures which serially constitute “spirit” in the Hegelian sense of the term. (...) thus all the degrees of recognition bring about a movement through regions of meaning irreducible in principle to mere projections of instinct, to “illusions.” An exegesis of consciousness would consist in a progression through all the spheres of meaning that a given consciousness must encounter and appropriate in order to reflect itself as a self, a human, adult, conscious self.¹⁴¹⁰

¹⁴⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 461.

¹⁴¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 463.

Now, it is important to understand how for Ricœur – and also, it goes without saying, for Hegel – this path is more than simple narcissism. This is understood as a process of consciousness-formation through spirit (even maybe eventually ending up in *objective spirit* and institutions, as in the Hegelian mature *Philosophy of Right*, even though Ricœur does not explicitly claim this in *Freud and Philosophy*). As such, consciousness is only the internalization of a process which for Hegel was metaphysical and that we could perhaps characterize in postmetaphysical terms as simply a movement of culture. This is what Ricœur tentatively calls a “Hegelian metapsychology”.

In Hegel, Ricœur finds the production of culture as the movement of desire. But a desire which, as we know, is more than a simple desire of objects but rather a desire of desire; a desire of recognition. Now, recognition is one of the main threads which, for Ricœur, connects Hegel and Freud. In the analytical situation, as we have seen before, one seeks recognition too; recognition of truth unveiled, and recognition of oneself beyond dissimulation. But it is in the Hegelian processes of mutual recognition that the intersubjective mediation really becomes creative. Ricœur is not here distinguishing between a monological and a dialogical Hegel like Habermas and Honneth do, as we discussed in parts one and two. Nor between reciprocity and mutuality as he would do later. But we get the idea. Compared with Freud, Hegel places more importance on intersubjectivity, desire of desire, creative appropriation of meaning through teleological evolution. Ricœur sums up the antithesis in the following terms:

Spirit has its meaning in later forms or figures; it is a movement that always destroys its starting point and is secured only at the end. The unconscious, on the other hand, means that intelligibility always proceeds from earlier figures, whether this anteriority is understood in a strictly temporal or in a metaphorical sense. (...) In general terms, spirit is the realm of the terminal; the unconscious, the realm of the primordial. To put the antithesis most concisely, I will say that spirit is history and the unconscious is fate.¹⁴¹¹

However, as I stated before, this is, for Ricœur, more than a simple antithesis. As such, he also undertakes the uncovering of an implicit teleology in Freudianism, the details of which I cannot follow here. Suffice it to say that he concludes that

¹⁴¹¹ *Ibid.*, p. 468.

desire is unsurpassable. Desire is mediated, not eradicated and the self will remain embattled all the way through.¹⁴¹² For instance, as I said, the analytical relation can be seen as struggle for recognition. Between satisfaction of desire and recognition a long and hard mediation needs to take place. Desire is almost always intersubjective and taking place in a context of struggle.

4.3.3 – Taking sides in the conflict of interpretations

Ultimately, in *Freud and Philosophy*, as almost everywhere else, Ricœur is hinging on a complicated relation between the recognition of conflicts and the search of a fragile mediation and / or conciliation. That much is explicitly admitted at the end of the book.¹⁴¹³ Ricœur's answer, as I stated before, lies in the postulate of the overdetermination of symbols, those in which the different hermeneutic styles find their place, in a sort of enlarged perspective. This is the exemplary case of the Oedipus symbol, which Ricœur takes as being paradigmatic. Both the Freudian and the Hegelian perspective on it are valid, as both disclose different aspects of it, namely, as an archaic sexual tragedy or as a tragedy of the progressive disclosure of truth.¹⁴¹⁴ However, as I also stated before, for all his talk on arbitration, Ricœur is really taking sides here, because what he aimed to do at the outset was not only to put forward the claims of the hermeneutics of suspicion but also to find its limits and to spell out a post-critical faith and a post-critical hermeneutics as recollection of meaning. Ricœur's conclusion is therefore a return to the hermeneutical circle: "believe in order to understand and understand in order to believe."¹⁴¹⁵ That the subject is first lost and then found after a long mediation, and that this mediation is pushed in opposite directions by Freud and Hegel is perhaps the main conclusion of the book, but maybe can we say that Ricœur's main goal was precisely to defend the possibility of recovery of meaning even after the traversal of suspicion.¹⁴¹⁶

As such, Ricœur's first hermeneutic theory is also an hermeneutics centered on the plurivocity of symbols, on their plurality of levels (Freudian

¹⁴¹² *Ibid.*, p. 472.

¹⁴¹³ *Ibid.*, pp. 494-495.

¹⁴¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 515 ff.

¹⁴¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 525.

¹⁴¹⁶ See the section "The value and limits of a psychoanalysis of religion", pp. 531 ff.

regressive symbols, Hegelian prospective symbols, religious symbols and so forth)¹⁴¹⁷ and wagering on the possibility of taking them as being creative, true, and as partially addressing themselves to me. From this follows that we can ask, as I asked before, if Ricœur is really arbitrating the conflict, or rather taking sides. I definitely think it is the latter case. And I don't see any problem in it. But for our typology of conflict, we must realize that up to some extent Ricœur is *against* the hermeneutics of suspicion, and that this is a conflict in which he takes part. Ultimately, Ricœur pleads for a “non-narcissistic reconciliation”.¹⁴¹⁸ But this his own particular viewpoint, assumed with his characteristic *Redlichkeit*. The last sentence of the book invokes the love of Creation, over and above mere resignation to Ananke.¹⁴¹⁹ We can only conclude that what is at stake is not only the definition of hermeneutics. It is also the viability of Ricœur's own perspective and existential standpoint. So this is for him an act of applied hermeneutics as much as it is a theoretical exploration. Which, of course, does not taint in the least his conclusions.

In the transition to the first to the second phase of his hermeneutic theory his engagement would be expressed in a different way, assuming a more political than religious tone. Its cornerstone is emancipatory utopia, more than post-critical faith. At the same time, the definition of hermeneutics as an “arc” between explanation and understanding, and the choosing of texts rather than symbols as its basic units would ultimately provide a better, more encompassing model. In the dialectic whose thread I will follow in the next chapter we will find a model which is perhaps better suited to hermeneutic practice, and one in which Ricœur plays a less engaged role. As such, that dialectic might tell us less about our existence, but it will ultimately prove more creative, and with a result less decided a priori, than the previous dialectic of symbols.

¹⁴¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 505.

¹⁴¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 549.

¹⁴¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 551.

4.4 – Explanation vs. Understanding

As I stated before, the transition towards the mature hermeneutic theory starts taking shape in the early 1970s. I already recalled the main traits of this phase, so I will skip directly to the dialectic between explanation and understanding.

4.4.1 – Interpretation as the result of the dialectic between explanation and understanding

In the article called “What is a text? Explanation and Understanding”¹⁴²⁰ Ricœur puts forward his hermeneutical model based on texts. He takes as a point of departure Dilthey’s classical opposition between the methods of explanation, taken to be the model of intelligibility pertaining to natural sciences, and the operation of understanding as an alleged fundamental attitude of the human sciences. In my opinion, this is a truly dialectical model in Ricoeurian hermeneutics because, unlike in the conflict between suspicion and recollection of meaning we have seen above, here there is really the production of a third, original position. This is a model whose level of generality is superior to the hermeneutics of symbols presented in the first phase of his hermeneutical theory.

As such, Ricœur’s tactic in dealing with this conflict is to show that it is not really a conflict, or rather, that if a conflict indeed exists, the best way to deal with it is to let both parties play a role. Firstly, he notes that in his own time the methods of explanation are more borrowed from linguistic models than from natural science. Today, we might add, it is exactly the opposite; we have come back to the dominance of the naturalistic models. But this is irrelevant to Ricœur’s claim.

What is, therefore, a text? It is any discourse fixed by writing. If, as Plato argues, the author can no longer answer for a given text (unlike the person with whom we speak in live interaction) on the other hand the plurivocity of the meanings of that text is opened up by the plurality of potential readers and readings of the written text.

¹⁴²⁰ Ricœur, “What is a text? Explanation and Understanding” in *From Text to Action*, pp. 105-124 and the section “Explanation and Understanding”, pp. 125-143.

Applied to the text as a hermeneutic object, what does the dialectic between explanation and understanding teach us? Should we strive to understand a text, or to explain it? If we follow Dilthey's claim, this is perhaps seen as a strict alternative. But Ricœur has a suppler solution to offer. He pleads for the depsychologization of interpretation. The meaning of a text is not to be found in the intention of his or her author, but rather in the strata of meaning that explanation can uncover. Which does not mean that meaning is utterly reducible to explanation. But to grasp its inner workings is important. It is in this way that Ricœur recovers once again the structuralist explanations, and more specifically the semiological analyzes. However, and to reiterate, one of the fundamental postulates which he never drops is that we must go beyond these analyzes and concede that language is never for its own sake; that it always, one way or another, refers back to reality.

This is partially effected through the coincidence between the interpretation of a text and self-interpretation. As such, the detour through objective signs and works of culture of which Ricœur spoke before, is now coalesced in texts. One is able to understand him or herself better by appropriating for him or herself the possibilities contained in texts themselves:

By "appropriation," I understand this: that the interpretation of a text culminates in the self-interpretation of a subject who thenceforth understands himself better, understands himself differently, or simply begins to understand himself.¹⁴²¹

This of course will be understood as the collision of two worlds, namely the world of the text and the world of the reader. What Ricœur asserts is that to some extent "the constitution of the *self* is contemporaneous with the constitution of meaning."¹⁴²² Since the sentences of a text only make sense to a reader, because they are actualized *hic et nunc* in every act of reading, not only is the text not completely closed in itself. Indeed, its significance – ethical or otherwise – is also a significance *for me*.

The inner mechanisms of this process were to be worked out in what Ricœur famously called the "hermeneutical arc". When trying to find a theoretical

¹⁴²¹ Ricœur, "What is a text", p. 118.

¹⁴²² *Ibid.*, p. 119.

support to the attitude of “explanation” Ricœur often mentioned structuralism or semiology, but one can argue that different levels of explanation can be found, supported by different angles. Be that as it may, he stipulates that the explanatory phases are what allow for the mediation between a naïve interpretation and a critical interpretation:

If we regard structural analysis as a *stage* – and a necessary one – between a naïve and a critical interpretation, between a surface and a depth interpretation, then it seems possible to situate explanation and interpretation along a unique *hermeneutical arc* and to integrate the opposed attitudes of explanation and understanding within an overall conception of reading as the recovery of meaning.¹⁴²³

We can see what Ricœur is doing here. I mentioned how in the conflict between suspicion and recollection of meaning, recollection somehow won the battle against suspicion. Now when Ricœur is mentioning the “recovery of meaning” (the French reads “la reprise du sens”, using the same exact words of Eric Weil, which might provide a lead on the way he is using it) as the “overall conception of reading” he is somehow attesting this win and the importance of the appropriation of meaning. In the same way he had incorporated suspicion before, as a critical mediation between naïve faith and post-critical faith, now he is stepping up a notch, elevating the degree of abstraction by replacing suspicion with explanation, but the movement is more or less the same. Between a naïve interpretation and a critical interpretation there lies explanation, and this all contributes to a clearer, better understanding of the text. His definition is therefore the following: “to explain is to bring out the structure, that is, the internal relations of dependence that constitute the statics of the text; to interpret is to follow the path of thought opened up by the text, to place oneself en route toward the *orient* of the text.”¹⁴²⁴ Now this orientation towards the “orient” of the text, that is, towards its effects is very important. Ricœur further explains that beyond the subjective process of interpretation (something done “on the text”) there is thus an “objective” process of interpretation which amounts to the acts *of* the text. This is, precisely, a way to connect with the *Wirkungsgeschichte*. What Ricœur sometimes calls the “thing” of

¹⁴²³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁴²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

the text (*la chose du texte*) inscribes itself objectively in the world and produces effects.

In a nutshell, Ricœur solves the conflict between explanation and understanding by arguing that we need to explain more, in order to understand better (in another of his concise formulae: “expliquer plus c’est comprendre mieux”). That is, our main goal will be to understand the text and our hope is that, in so doing, we can also come to a greater degree of clarity about ourselves. But explanation, as Ricœur sees it, does not necessarily negate understanding. Indeed, many times, it is quite the opposite. Explanation corrects and reorients understanding, paving the way for a more informed understanding. As such, in the dialectics between explanation and understanding what we have is the production of a *new* result: interpretation. Or better put, an open-ended process of interpretation and reinterpretation with new instantiations being put forward with every new act of reading. As such, this is a place of Ricoeurian hermeneutics where productive conflict is really at work. Understanding is both at the beginning and the end of the process (insofar as interpretation entails a better understanding) but without the mediation of explanatory procedures, it would not be questioned and so it would not evolve. Ultimately, in “Explanation and Understanding”¹⁴²⁵ Ricœur wagers on the continuity and reciprocal complementarity between these two processes and tries to find an homology between the domains of hermeneutics, action theory and historiography, in order to show how this dialectics can be applied in these three disciplines. However, his less abstract and more simple clarifications and examples of these processes are in fact given in the only published debate he had with Gadamer.

4.4.2 – The clarifications in the debate with Gadamer

In 1982 Ricœur and Gadamer participated in a public event in which a discussion between the two, as well as questions and answers coming from the public, were recorded. This debate was later published in English.¹⁴²⁶ In this debate, which was very cordial, the affinities but also some of the differences

¹⁴²⁵ See Ricœur, “Explanation and Understanding. On some remarkable Connections between the Theory of Texts, Action Theory, and the Theory of History” in *From Text to Action*, pp. 125-143.

¹⁴²⁶ See Ricœur “The Conflict of Interpretations: Debate with Hans-Georg Gadamer” in *A Ricœur Reader*, edited by Mário J. Valdez (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1991), pp. 216-241.

between their respective standpoints on hermeneutics are apparent, even if we have the impression that Ricœur sometimes refrains from providing a full reply to Gadamer, perhaps out of deference, or maybe just because of lack of time. The debate mentions the “conflict of interpretations” in its title, and I already discussed how important this conflict is for Ricœur, and also how with this notion Ricœur distances himself from Gadamer’s insistence on the fusion of horizons. But when reading this debate we cannot help escaping the impression that Gadamer was not fully aware of the shift in Ricœur’s hermeneutics; that is, we feel that Gadamer pays homage but also somehow criticizes the conflict of interpretations, conflating it with Ricœur’s approach taken as a whole, whereas Ricœur tries to spell out his mature theory, revolving around the connection between explanation and understanding, the theory of texts, and so forth.

Perhaps due to this need to almost present anew the twists and turns of his hermeneutical theory, Ricœur turns out to be quite clear when explaining it. Firstly, he distinguishes between conflicts *within* interpretation and conflicts of interpretations. The conflict between hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics as recollection of meaning is a conflict of interpretations. But the conflict between explanation and understanding is, as it were, a conflict *within* interpretation; or, could we say, a conflict which *defines* interpretation. He claims that the philosopher does not only bear testimony to the radical situations of conflict, but more often than not tries to mediate them.¹⁴²⁷ Also, and very significantly, he confirms what I have been alluding to over and again: namely, that these conflicts need to be dealt with “step by step” in a “case by case”¹⁴²⁸ scenario, rather than working out a wholly encompassing hermeneutical theory. He describes the several stages in the interpretative arc as going “from naïve understanding to mature understanding through learned explanation”¹⁴²⁹ and he adds that this is a movement of *many* interpretations.¹⁴³⁰ That is, the arc can have many stages, often contradictory, many times revisable.

Emphasizing that this process of mediation and detour might be long and painstaking is important for Ricœur. At this point in time, he also distinguished between mediated and unmediated conflicts. He asserted that “it is the task of the

¹⁴²⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 223.

¹⁴²⁸ *Ibid.*

¹⁴²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 226.

¹⁴³⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

philosopher to learn how to master mediation between being confronted with *unmediated conflict*”¹⁴³¹ and by “*unmediated conflicts*” he seems to mean the raw conflicts of instincts with which psychoanalysis deals. He also stresses the importance of the analytical relation, over and above the strictly theoretical texts of Freudianism (which is not surprising, since this is a text from the 1980s).

In this debate, Ricœur seems eager – more than elsewhere – to agree with Gadamer. For instance, he stresses that we need to go beyond unmediated conflicts, and he compares this to Gadamer’s insistence on dialogue. He claims that dialogue is just a position of mediation, and that “the philosopher proceeds through progressive mediations”.¹⁴³² This is indeed a significant part of his method. But as I think I have already shown, there are many occasions in which Ricœur does insist on raw conflict.

At some point, Gadamer expresses doubts about the process of mediation, invoking the specter that always haunted Ricœur, precisely that of the distortion of the positions he wanted to mediate. Gadamer asks:

Again, how much might there remain of the extreme positions one is attempting to mediate? It is possible that they cannot be brought together on a new level and in a new form of approach.¹⁴³³

In his response, Ricœur chooses to center the discussion in the explanation / understanding dialectic and to provide concrete examples. Concerning the way we can incorporate structuralist or other modes of explanation in the way we read a text, he ends up providing examples of the interpretation of cultural artifacts such as poems and music:

I may thereafter reincorporate the structural analysis into an understanding which will be no longer a kind of naïve reading, but a learned reading. This is what I think we all do when we read a poem, first at the surface of the work, and then in a final reading, when we understand the underlying structure. In this final reading we forget all the analytical approaches; it is a kind of second life taken up in the reading itself. Isn’t this what we do when we study, for example, the sonata structure of the first movement of a symphony of

¹⁴³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁴³² *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁴³³ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Beethoven? It's not lost time to see how the first phrase and the second theme work out in the composition, and finally in the coda – that does not spoil our pleasure. On the contrary, the understanding of the underlying structure comes also to underlie our pleasure.¹⁴³⁴

I think this last passage is rather self-explanatory. There is a sort of eulogy of the intellectual pleasure of discovery implicit in Ricœur's words. He does not directly answer Gadamer. Indeed, it is possible that something might be, as it were, *lost in translation*, or even lost in interpretation. Some conflicts are maybe left unmediated, and other mediations perhaps sometimes do not do justice to each of the poles in conflict. But that is the process of interpretation, and Ricœur ultimately wagers more in homology than in radical epistemological breaks.

This phase of Ricœur's hermeneutical theory would eventually end up in strong analyzes of action which, in turn, would make way for his mature hermeneutics of the self. Again, these are very complex and nuanced approaches. Firstly, I will work out the main details of Ricœur's analyzes of action. In the next chapter I will deal with the descriptive-analytic discourse of action put forward by phenomenology and philosophy of language; then, in the final chapter of this part I will recall his more general hermeneutics of action, including his peculiar take on the debate between hermeneutics and the critique of ideology.

¹⁴³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

4.5 – Phenomenology vs. Philosophy of Language in the *Discours de l'Action*

The *Discours de l'action* has a specific status in the context of Ricœur's production. On the one hand, it is a *polycopié* of some lectures originally given at the Université Catholique de Louvain in 1971 and later republished by the C.N.R.S. in 1977 as the introduction to *La sémantique de l'action*.¹⁴³⁵ As such, it has the status of any other of Ricœur's lectures, like the lectures on hermeneutics or those on Plato and Aristotle; that is, admittedly, a somewhat inferior status to the one granted to his books. The lectures were meant as general introductions, and perhaps they do not display the level of complexity and originality reserved for his books. This was, we can argue, Ricœur's assessment. But in many cases, we cannot say that the lectures lack in originality or boldness. The *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, for instance, are for me one of his most important books. On the other hand, even if it is a *polycopié* we are talking about, these are one of the few lectures which have been translated and published in other languages, such as Italian and Portuguese. Recently, I revised and introduced the previously existent Portuguese translation, taking into account several corrections and additions to the original French version added by Ricœur himself.¹⁴³⁶ These lectures are Ricœur's first systematic attempt to coordinate phenomenology and analytical philosophy (especially philosophy of language). This important task, which assumed a pioneering status in the context of the French philosophical landscape of the 1970s, was later fully developed in *Oneself as Another*. Because it served as an introduction to analytical philosophy in this context, and because it was deemed so important that even though these were lectures, they were already republished and translated during Ricœur's lifetime, the *Discours de l'action* deserves to be mentioned here. For the purposes of this thesis, I will mainly tackle the way in which Ricœur displays the conflict between philosophy of language and phenomenology, and the solution he puts forward for it.

¹⁴³⁵ See Ricœur, "Le Discours de l'Action" in *La sémantique de l'action*, edited by Dorian Tiffeneau (Paris: Éditions du C.N.R.S., 1977), pp. 3-132.

¹⁴³⁶ See Ricœur, *O Discurso da Ação*, edited by Gonçalo Marcelo (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2013). I thank Catherine Goldenstein for granting me access to the Ricœur materials of these lectures, which allowed me to find his corrections and additions, as well as many other illuminating explications of the content of the lectures. This section is partially based on the Portuguese introduction I wrote for that volume.

The *Discours de l'action* is divided in five chapters: 1) “Le discours de l'action”¹⁴³⁷ (the discourse of action); 2) “Le réseau conceptuel de l'action”¹⁴³⁸ (the conceptual network of action) which comprises the main chapter and an important appendix analyzing Austin’s speech act theory; 3) “L’analyse propositionnelle des énoncés d’action”¹⁴³⁹ (the propositional analysis of action utterances); 4) “Motif et cause”¹⁴⁴⁰ (motive and cause) and 5) “Phénoménologie et analyse linguistique”¹⁴⁴¹ (phenomenology and linguistic analysis). To be sure, when Ricœur is alluding to “linguistic analysis” in the last chapter, what he means is not linguistics as a separate body of knowledge such as it had been put forward in the wake of Saussure, but rather the semantic and pragmatic analyses of analytical philosophy. Indeed, analytical philosophy appears to Ricœur at this point in time as providing some kind of liberation. To turn to ordinary language philosophy and its pluralized uses, and to be able to find meaning in all these uses seems very important for Ricœur, in that it allows him to go beyond the purely synchronic structuralist analyses and the danger they run of completely eliding the subject and his or her capacity for creating meaning. However, analytical philosophy and its linguistic turn do not seem, in themselves, capable of fully depleting the phenomena of human language and action, no more than the previous methodologies assessed by Ricœur. As such, there is a tension, a conflict even, between phenomenology and analytical philosophy of action that structures the whole book; ultimately, Ricœur’s solution is similar to the one proposed before in the conflict between structuralism and hermeneutics: the conflict is solved, exactly as in Kant’s second set of antinomies, by arguing that both approaches are true, albeit in different levels. As such, Ricœur’s own standpoint is the one that pretends to encompass (in a hermeneutic manner, it goes without saying) both approaches.

Allow me to sum up the main traits and claims of the book, before analyzing with a slightly superior degree of detail its last chapter, where the conflict between phenomenology and analytical philosophy is permitted to unfold, and then reined in. The first chapter of the *Discours de l'action* defines the stakes

¹⁴³⁷ Ricœur, “Le Discours de l’Action” in *La sémantique de l’action*, pp. 3-20.

¹⁴³⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 21-64.

¹⁴³⁹ *Ibid.*, pp. 65-84.

¹⁴⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 85-112.

¹⁴⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 113-132.

of a discourse (or a semantics) of action, properly understood as a part of a broader philosophy of action. In the next chapter of this part of my thesis, I will show how this approach is complemented by a properly hermeneutical take on action. The semantic and pragmatic analyzes, coupled with the hermeneutical take, will lay the ground for Ricœur's complex position put forward in *Oneself as Another*. In this first chapter of the *Discours de l'action* Ricœur emphasizes that a philosophy of action, no matter what its emphasis or specific take, is to be distinguished from a science of action. It is in the first chapter that we find the description of the main contents of the book: the introduction to ordinary language philosophy, the delimitation of the conceptual network of action and a particular emphasis on speech act theory. And even though Ricœur ultimately aims at going beyond analytical philosophy, he emphasizes the importance of ordinary language philosophy in the liberation from logical positivism. It is not only descriptive utterances, which describe facts, that have meaning. Thus the idea that there is meaning to be discovered in other linguistic entities is fundamental for him.

Ricœur insists that in a philosophy of action the best starting point is a linguistic analysis rather than a phenomenological description because if we start from these descriptions we risk falling back in a situation of introspection and incommunicability of lived experiences. The analytical philosophy of action, on the other hand, points towards objective structures found in everyday use, that is, creations of meaning that are constitutively public and intersubjective. However, the plurality of language games can in itself fall prey to a problem, namely, the impossibility of introducing any type of hierarchization among them. Language games are radically plural. As such, there might be a difficulty in subsuming them under a common set of rules; or worse, they might tend to be arbitrary, not being able to undergo any universalization. In the worst-case scenario, they could be only a particularity of the English language, as it were. This type of philosophy, thinks Ricœur in the 1970s, finds it difficult to reach a properly transcendental standpoint, which is Ricœur's aim in this domain. And this is why he ultimately comes back to phenomenology. To say it quickly, for him, the private lived experience that is phenomenologically described will have to be expressed in a public utterance to be recognized. However, the latter will in turn be grounded in the noema that the phenomenological analysis uncovers. That is, the noema, and its public, linguistic expression are two sides of the same coin. Consequently, even

though in the order of exposition the linguistic analysis is the first *quoad nos*, phenomenology is ultimately, for Ricœur, more fundamental *quoad se*. Because it is phenomenology that grounds the experiences that will be linguistically analyzed. Together, phenomenology and linguistic analysis form what Ricœur calls the *descriptive-analytic* discourse of action which will later be encompassed in an hermeneutics of action.

In the second chapter Ricœur undertakes a conceptual analysis of the field of action, through its main notions: action, intention, motive, cause, agent. One of his main claims consists in strongly asserting that the signification of any one of these notions presupposes the signification of all the others, in the context of their network. That is, even though each one of these concepts is different from the other, they have to be grasped as a whole if we are to understand the domain of action. Ricœur pays special attention to the distinction between motives and causes. Even though they are evidently different concepts, and although the psychological motive does not always correspond to the cause of a certain action (and so there are different language games at stake here, one pertaining more to the physical order, and the other to the psychological domain) Ricœur mentions the case of desire. Desires, as he had already seen in *Freud and Philosophy* are of a mixed nature: they are force (energetics) and meaning. In desire, motives and causes partially overlap and so we must understand how desires mobilize us; how, in spite of being a motive, they can also be considered a cause. In the appendix, Ricœur introduces the discussion of the “if’s” and “can’s” in Austin, and he starts to explore the modes in which actions can be attributed to agents, as he would do in a much more developed manner in *Oneself as Another*. However, already at this point, he mentions Strawson’s identifying reference, imputation and the power to act. This would in turn lead to the more systematic uncovering of the agent and its insertion in the conceptual network of action in the 15/20 following years of Ricœur’s philosophy.

The third chapter is consecrated, almost in its entirety, to the presentation of the several types of speech acts according to J. L. Austin and John Searle, as well to the explication of the relationship between illocutionary force and the structure of the act of willing. Ricœur claims that the different types of speech act correspond to the different dimensions of human will. The chapter ends with the

examples of cases in which saying and doing are not equivalent to one another; that is, when there is a surplus in doing.

As for the fourth chapter, it elaborates on the connection between agents and causes, and pushes further the claim according to which the strict opposition between motives and cause does not always apply. In order to uphold this claim, Ricœur makes his first incursions in the anthropology of capacities. He asserts that the notion of agent is prior to the modern notion of cause. The agent, by being the author of his or her own acts, is simultaneously their cause and the one who is responsible for them. Hence, Ricœur tries to redefine and broaden the concept of causality, by discerning behind it, as it were, all the capacities, the power to act and its dialectical other, namely the ineradicable dimension of passivity that lies at the heart of human existence. This latter assertion forces Ricœur to take into account the dispositional aspects, which are tied to desires and emotions. In the end of the chapter he mentions Charles Taylor's early book *The Explanation of Behaviour*¹⁴⁴² and the way he puts forward his proposal of teleological explanation as an alternative to causal explanation. This is, to my knowledge, the first publication in which Ricœur systematically integrates Taylor's contributions. And it is well known how the neo-Aristotelian, teleological standpoint would prove to be decisive for Ricœur and his late philosophical anthropology.

Finally, the fifth chapter undertakes in a more profound manner the analysis of the conflict between phenomenology and analytical philosophy at the level of explanation, and ultimately tries to solve it by establishing some sort of hierarchy among them. Of all these lectures, this is the chapter with the greater interest, because it is here that Ricœur ventures to propose a more original take. And how does the conflict play out? In a first, more or less rough approach, analytic philosophy could charge phenomenology with the dangers of introspection and incommunicability and phenomenology could attack analytic philosophy on the grounds of not being able to grasp lived experience or the pre-linguistic layers of existence. But what Ricœur aims is at dissolving the conflict by actually accepting as much as possible from each of these takes, but each at its strategic level. This is the result of his enlarged standpoint. Maybe we can argue that Ricœur's theoretical solution is not as creative as the one presented in the

¹⁴⁴² See Charles Taylor, *The Explanation of Behaviour* (London: Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).

conflict between explanation and understanding shown in my preceding chapter. But the method of encompassing both approaches at different levels without denying any of their major solutions is more or less the same.

Allow me to flesh out in more detail the workings of Ricœur's solution to this conflict. According to him, there is complementarity between the two takes because the analysis of ordinary language exposes the difficulties of a phenomenology which would aim at nothing more than being a kind of introspective psychology whereas the eidetic analyses provide the theoretical kernel upon which the linguistic take must be grounded. Phenomenology's lived experience (*Erlebnis*) is for Ricœur the implicit and non-thematized reference of the fine analyses of meaning unveiled by ordinary language philosophy.¹⁴⁴³ This, in turn, leads to his stronger claim. Namely, that what will allow the concepts unveiled by ordinary language philosophy to attain a transcendental status and thus to make intelligible the structuring of language itself – how it actually works – is precisely its grounding in the eidetic essences discovered by the phenomenological method. And why is this? Because, or so the claim goes, the mere description of the uses of language will never be able to determine the correction (*justesse*) of a given use.¹⁴⁴⁴ Furthermore, even though analytic philosophy aims at spelling out the connection between language and reality (something which, for instance, is not upheld by structuralist analyses) Ricœur argues that it is phenomenology that better grounds this connection. And this because it is phenomenology that attests to the connection between the noema and its linguistic expression, which is established *de jure*. Ultimately, it will be phenomenology's contributions which will allow these linguistic analyses to become a real "philosophy of language" since, Ricœur argues, only phenomenology brings about the possibility of introducing distinctions, classifications and subordinations among language uses and language games, something which he does not think Post-Wittgensteinian ordinary language philosophy is able to do, because it rather insists in their utter irreducibility and plurality.

Hence, we can see how, exactly like he had done before with psychoanalysis, structuralism and so forth, Ricœur assimilates and integrates

¹⁴⁴³ Ricœur, "Le discours de l'action", *op. cit.*, p. 115.

¹⁴⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 120.

analytical philosophy, and in this case ordinary language philosophy more than any other strand of analytical philosophy, into his own project. With the particular mix of phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy put forth in *Le discours de l'action* Ricœur finds another way to prove one of the main claims of his hermeneutical period, namely that language stems from reality and eventually aims at coming back to it in different forms. As such, ordinary language philosophy is eventually very useful for Ricœur in his polemic against structuralism and the alleged closing off of language in itself. Now, as I have tried to spell out in a very rapid manner, this option by Ricœur is not tantamount to conflating in a confuse manner phenomenology and ordinary language philosophy. He tries, as always, to do justice to their different orientations and goals, but also to signal their limits and seek a meaningful articulation of their methodologies in his own standpoint and project. For instance, he concedes that phenomenology ultimately sends us back to the problematic of one's own body and to an attempt to sketch an ontology (following Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty), something that is absent from ordinary language philosophy, at least in these terms. He also admits that both these methodologies find another limit, that of the "opaque" zones of consciousness, such as they are tackled by psychoanalysis. However, according to Ricœur, the difference between them in what comes down to recognizing their limits is more apparent in phenomenology. That is, phenomenology is more self-aware of its own limitations insofar as it sends us back to the originary constitution of meaning, through the passive syntheses and so on. Phenomenology concedes that there is something in those processes that we might not be able to grasp. No such thing, Ricœur thinks, happens in ordinary language philosophy and so it runs the risk of becoming blind to its own limits. But the important aspect to emphasize according to him is that by detecting its respective blind spots and points of articulation, both these methods form a possible unity which is that of *the descriptive-analytic discourse of action*. Certainly, this is not yet a hermeneutical discourse, and even less a prescriptive discourse, such as the one assumed by ethics. But Ricœur will also evidently formulate these two discourses. Let us see how in the next few chapters.

4.6 – Towards a Hermeneutics and a Philosophy of Action

As I stated before, Ricœur's mature hermeneutic theory paid particular attention to the analyzes of action and the social imaginary. Many texts dealing with these topics were published in both *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* and *From Text to Action*. Actually some of the key texts were republished in both these collections. These are the cases of the two main texts I wish to recall here, before we delve into the practical conflict in the next part of this thesis. They are, respectively, "The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text" and "Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology" because they offer two striking examples of Ricœur's hermeneutics of action.¹⁴⁴⁵ The first of these texts lays the ground for his specific hermeneutical take on action, while the second is a very important programmatic text, because it touches on the social significance of hermeneutics. These will set the tone for some of the more applied, practical conflicts we will see in the next part.

4.6.1 – The linguistification of action

In "The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text"¹⁴⁴⁶ Ricœur takes a significant step towards a linguistification of human action. His starting point is a definition of hermeneutics as the interpretation of the written documents in our culture¹⁴⁴⁷ and its usual object as being texts as such. According to him, as we know, texts open up worlds. For Ricœur, "only man *has a world* and not just a situation"¹⁴⁴⁸ and this world is constituted by the ensemble of references opened up by texts, virtually "every text that we have read, understood, and loved".¹⁴⁴⁹

Now, Ricœur's bold and innovative move in this article is to consider that action itself can be understood as a text, because it shares some of the characteristics of texts. And how is this possible? By objectifying it and thus

¹⁴⁴⁵ For a discussion of Ricœur's hermeneutics of action see *Paul Ricœur, The Hermeneutics of Action*, edited by Richard Kearney (London: Sage, 2006).

¹⁴⁴⁶ See Ricœur, "The model of the text: meaningful action considered as a text" in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 197-221.

¹⁴⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

¹⁴⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 201.

¹⁴⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 202.

liberating it from the normal situation of everyday interaction. This objectification, done for scientific purposes, is taken to be akin to the fixation of texts in writing. According to Ricœur, therefore, we can detach the meaning of action from the event of action properly speaking.¹⁴⁵⁰ And this because we can identify a propositional content in action which has a persistence in time; it can be reidentified later, even after the event of action is long gone. Other than that, it also has, Ricœur argues, and as we just saw in the last chapter, a noematic content that can be grasped phenomenologically and all this suffices, in his opinion, for we to speak of a certain “objective” aspect of action as such. The corollary of this fact is that there is an autonomization of action from its author, such as there is an autonomization of texts.¹⁴⁵¹ One of the proofs thereof is that an action can, and in fact many times has, unintended consequences. Furthermore, this objective trait can be inscribed in the temporal dimension itself; as Ricœur contends, “an action leaves a ‘trace’, it makes its ‘mark’ when it contributes to the emergence of such patterns which become the *documents* of human action.”¹⁴⁵²

With this mentioning of “traces” left by action, and also of the possibility of treating them as “documents”, we reach the core of Ricœur’s argument. Like documents and texts, because actions have an objective character, they leave indelible marks with their own webs of signification and intersignification, which become sedimented and, moreover, accessible to those who wish to study and *interpret* them in new ways. Michaël Foessel has shed some light on an important topic concerning this take on social action. He argues that by so emphasizing the analogy between textuality and action, Ricœur is being influenced by his choice of history as the paradigmatic social science: actions taken as documents are those that for instance an historian attempts to reconstitute *a posteriori*. But this, Foessel claims, might result in an undue privilege given to the instituted (instead of the instituting, in the sense of Castoriadis)¹⁴⁵³ and can actually conceal something of the creative dimension of action on which Arendt (and Ricœur on many other places) insists. Be that as it may (and I do think Foessel is right in this claim) this is the heart of Ricœur’s hermeneutics of action. And it serves as a paradigmatic

¹⁴⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 204.

¹⁴⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 206 ff.

¹⁴⁵² *Ibid.*, p. 206.

¹⁴⁵³ See Michaël Foessel, “Action, Norms and Critique. Paul Ricœur and the powers of the imaginary”, translated by Gonçalo Marcelo, in *Philosophy Today, Ricœur, Justice and Institutions / Ricœur, la Justice et les institutions*, edited by Gonçalo Marcelo (2014, forthcoming).

model for similar takes on social action¹⁴⁵⁴, such as those put forward by Johann Michel or Anna Borisenkova; Michel undertakes to spell out an ambitious project of a “sociology of the self”¹⁴⁵⁵, largely inspired by Ricœur’s hermeneutic take on social action, while Borisenkova¹⁴⁵⁶ explains the significance of a hermeneutic and narrative refiguration of social events, also within a Ricoeurian framework.

And as we know, Ricœur would find a meaningful application for the creative use of the social imaginary, namely, utopia. If action can be considered as a text and if therefore actions, our human powers, are also open to new applications and interpretations, it must be possible to criticize reified and possibly unfair patterns of action and sedimentation of power. Let us see how in the next section.

4.6.2 – Ricœur’s hermeneutical critique of ideologies

In part two above I mentioned the importance of the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. I now want to come back to the topic of the critique of ideologies and the Gadamer-Habermas debate and Ricœur’s position within it, because he adopts a very peculiar stance, which reveals an unusual position on the relation between language and action. Indeed, it will appear that for Ricœur not only is action linguistically mediated, but that when there are reifications of practices which are given a linguistic and symbolic undue status, it will be by a mutual reinforcement between action and symbolism that these undue reifications will be countered.

Like Castoriadis, Ricœur insists in the imaginary constitution of society and thus in its symbolic dimension. Ideology, as stated before, is the surplus of meaning given to the phenomena of belief in the legitimacy of power, because exercise of power is more than naked use of force, that is, it needs a legitimation and thus constitutively tends to try to provide such a justification. But how would Ricœur counter it, and what does this reveal about the nature of the fundamental

¹⁴⁵⁴ On Ricœur’s take on social events, see Gilbert Vincent, “Anthropologie philosophique et sociologie. Ricœur et l’analyse des phénomènes sociaux” in *Revue des Sciences Sociales* 40 (2008): 162-183.

¹⁴⁵⁵ See Johann Michel, “Construire une sociologie herméneutique en venant de Ricœur” in *Sociologie du Soi. Essai d’herméneutique appliquée* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2012), pp. 21-40.

¹⁴⁵⁶ See Anna Borisenkova, “Narrative Refiguration of Social Events. Paul Ricœur’s Contribution to Rethinking the Social”, in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 1, 1 (2010), pp. 87-98.

philosophical stance as such?

In “Hermeneutics and the critique of ideology”¹⁴⁵⁷ he revisits the Gadamer-Habermas debate and describes its decisive status. According to him, this debate decides the “fundamental gesture of philosophy”. Ultimately, is this “an act of defiance, a critical gesture”¹⁴⁵⁸ or an avowal of finitude and historicity? Or, in other words, is it an act of belonging or distancing? Of “hearing” and welcoming, accepting something which preexists us, or rather criticizing, eventually denouncing and ultimately transforming it? What should philosophy do with the “given” (assuming that such a thing exists), take it as it is, or transforming it?

Now, this strikes me as being a fundamental discussion, indeed a fundamental conflict, not only in philosophy, but in human life as such (and namely in the aspects pertaining to human action, whether they are envisaged from a political or an ethical standpoint). And the originality of Ricœur’s position is to want to situate himself, perhaps even more than in other conflicts, in a strict middle ground. According to him, it is the alternative that must be challenged because it is possible to formulate a hermeneutics which does justice to the critique of ideologies: i.e., it is possible to formulate a *hermeneutical* critique of ideologies. Again, Ricœur’s solution, strikes me, in its general traits, to be very important and well worked out.

A hermeneutical standpoint on the social is important because it is what allows us to grasp, as much as possible, the “thick” dimensions of everyday life in existing, historical societies. And a hermeneutical project which not only aims at understanding these historical aspects, but also at eventually criticizing the, so to speak, “condemnable” aspects of it, strikes me as being fair. How to do it, that is another question.

To reiterate, Ricœur really wants to reach middle ground. Perhaps (and this is episodic, but the fact that it is so does not mean that it is without importance) because he wanted to do justice to both Gadamer and Habermas. As a consequence, he argues that both belonging and distancing will play an important role in his hermeneutical theory. We are both affected by the

¹⁴⁵⁷ See Ricœur, “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology” in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 63-100.

¹⁴⁵⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 63.

meaningful traditions which preexist us and condition us, and we must be able to criticize what needs to be criticized. Or at least this is, let us say, Ricœur's professed position. He intends to spell out the project of what he himself calls a "critical hermeneutics".¹⁴⁵⁹ Therefore, he recovers both the need of reconstruction as a path for understanding¹⁴⁶⁰ and the practical interest on emancipation.¹⁴⁶¹ In the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* Ricœur encapsulates this necessary reciprocal complementarity in yet another short formula, paraphrasing and adapting Kant's comment on the relation between concepts and intuitions. He states "Hermeneutics without a project of liberation is blind, but a project of emancipation without historical experience is empty."¹⁴⁶² In the text whose thread we have been following in this section, he provides a further clarification on this connection. According to him, this ultimately means that critique is *not* the most fundamental moment and thus that there is no reason to oppose, as Habermas does, the critical social sciences to the hermeneutical sciences. Thus for him

The interest in emancipation would be quite empty and abstract if it were not situated on the same plane as the historical-hermeneutic sciences, that is, on the plane of communicative action. But if that is so, can a critique of distortions be separated from the communicative experience itself, from the place where it begins, where it is real and where it is exemplary? The task of the hermeneutics of tradition is to remind the critique of ideology that man can project his emancipation and anticipate an unlimited and unconstrained communication only on the basis of the creative reinterpretation of cultural heritage. (...) It seems to me that critique can be neither the first instance nor the last.¹⁴⁶³

So Ricœur's last word on this article is to propose that only a creative renewal of cultural heritage is able to put forward an ideal such as that of a consensus, or an emphasis on communicative action itself.¹⁴⁶⁴ In a way, we can understand what Ricœur is claiming. If we want emancipation, we have to understand what we are emancipating ourselves from, and we have to postulate something as an ideal to strive for, and where can we find that ideal if not in the

¹⁴⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 87 ff.

¹⁴⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 92.

¹⁴⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

¹⁴⁶² Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, pp. 236-237.

¹⁴⁶³ *Ibid.*, p. 97.

¹⁴⁶⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 99.

recreation of something which precedes us? Otherwise, the attempts to start something strictly from scratch might have its dangers, as in the so-called Reign of Terror of the French Revolution.

In a way, this insistence that “critique” is only a mediating moment, not the first nor the last position we adopt, is not surprising in Ricœur. Indeed, this is the same role he grants the hermeneutics of suspicion or, later, as we shall see, the deontological moment in his little ethics of *Oneself as Another*. But allow me to see in this a tension in Ricœur’s own hermeneutical standpoint, and its influence on his practical philosophy. Later, and with Hannah Arendt, he would emphasize the importance of the novelty brought about by human action, and even in this phase he mentions it, by defining that which he calls “initiative”.¹⁴⁶⁵ However, how can there be anything really “new” in society, brought about by human action, if anything and everything we can aspire to is always somehow a reinterpretation of a pre-existing given? From the standpoint of a social ontology, societies would seem to experience novelty only through new combinations of already pre-existing elements. And frankly, this claim is as problematic as its opposite: namely, the affirmation that something really *new* and *unpredictable* can show up in existing practice, or at least be postulated as an ideal, out of nowhere.

Let us at least admit that this tension exists in Ricœur’s standpoint. This leads him, as I just noted, to place some boundaries on the notion of critique, and also, ultimately, on the ways in which, in his view, emancipation can legitimately be sought after. These limitations are evident in a text called “Science and Ideology”, also published both in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* and *From Text to Action*. I will undertake a closer reading of this text in part seven, where I will explore in a critical manner the discrepancies it bears with the project of a critical theory to which I myself adhere. For the moment being, suffice it to say that even though Ricœur purports to be halfway between belonging and distanciation, interpretation of traditions and critique of ideologies, I think he is ultimately closer to the pole of belonging, at least on some notable occasions, as he is to the pole of critique. This will lead, in part seven of this thesis, to one of my modest critiques towards his own standpoint.

Be that as it may, at least in his own depiction of his theory, Ricœur

¹⁴⁶⁵ See Ricœur, “Initiative” in *From Text to Action*, pp. 208-222.

professes to hermeneutically criticize ideologies, and the last stages of his mature hermeneutical theory, such as we have been following them in *From Text to Action* and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences* bear witness to a philosophy of action and one which is intrinsically hermeneutical and symbolical. It is, itself, open to conflicts, one of the main instantiations of them being the conflict between ideology and utopia, which I mentioned many times, but that will only be presented with a slight greater degree of detail in part five below.

Throughout this fourth part that now reaches its end, we have seen Ricœur's initial thematic exposition of the conflict of interpretations in his first hermeneutic phase, and the many ramifications it developed afterwards, being successively applied to conflicts between hermeneutics of suspicion and hermeneutics of recollection of meaning, the constitution of the self in archeological and teleological types of consciousness, and the definition of hermeneutics itself in the conflict between explanation and understanding, belonging and distancing, and so on. This last chapter also showed how even though this is a "hermeneutical phase", which entails an even greater degree of linguistification and symbolization than what he had posited, for instance, in *The Symbolism of Evil* and *Freud and Philosophy*, Ricœur never loses sight of the topic of action and its possible analyzes.

As such, the ground is laid for us to understand how, ultimately, Ricœur would develop, in the last stage of his career, a philosophical anthropology decisively grounded in the notion of action, and of one's capacities. This stage will be reached with the preparation and posterior publication of *Oneself as Another*, a decisive book indeed. This renewed emphasis on action, and all the new perspectives of conflict it opens, will be the topic of the next, and last stage of this "course of conflict".

Part Five

The Practical Conflict

We now enter the last stage of this course of conflict in the thought of Paul Ricœur. Up to now we have seen how Ricœur started from the problematic of existence and, from the 1960s onwards and due to a shift in his thinking, undertook a hermeneutic turn. Hence, the main instantiations of conflict were in language and interpretation, due to the linguistification of his philosophy, the long detour, and the fragmented philosophy that resulted from the broken status of language itself as it was diagnosed by Ricœur in the last stage.

However, as we have also seen, this broken status does not condemn us to despair or relativism. It might entail a perspectivism, but Ricœur never ceased to have human action in mind or to believe in the force of convictions. In *Fallible Man* he had undertaken a first attempt to devise a philosophical anthropology. At the time, it revolved around the notion of fallibility, as we have seen.

One striking feature of Ricœur, the citizen, was his willingness not only to actively think the events of his time, but also to take position in the most significant of them. Sometimes, he was even a committed activist, his opposition to the war in Algeria only being the most famous example of such involvement. If we follow François Dosse's claim, this willingness to become involved in the matters of the "polis" was precisely reinforced with Ricœur's coming of age, and even more when he retired from the university and therefore had more free time.

A note on his biography is therefore needed once again. After the rejection of *Freud and Philosophy* by Lacan and his followers, all the trouble at Nanterre and so forth, and after the, so to speak, "American exile" the reception of Ricœur's books in France was lukewarm. This was true in the 1970s and lasted perhaps more than a decade, which included the publication of such splendid books as *The Rule of Metaphor*. Indeed, allow me to reiterate again that for me Ricœur's most creative, bold and radical period is precisely around 1975, when he was deep into the processes of creative imagination and the radicality of basic metaphoricity and utopia. However, this was almost overlooked in France at the time.

Nonetheless, Ricœur's reception in France changed in the 1980s with the publication of the intellectual monument called *Time and Narrative*. If not for anything else, the sheer erudition of this work commanded respect. And so, little by little, the reception of his thought grew wider in France and elsewhere. By the late 1980s we could already speak of his consecration, and the Cerisy colloquium in 1988 was a proof thereof, as often these colloquia are.

However, Ricœur's thought was ahead of his publications. In 1986 *From Text to Action* was published, revealing his mature hermeneutical theory in its full scope. It is true that most of these texts had originally been published in the 1970s, but for occasional readers who only read the books, not the sparse articles published in many different places, it might seem that by 1986 Ricœur's main line of work was strictly hermeneutical. And yet, another shift had been taking place already. Precisely in 1986 he gave the prestigious Gifford Lectures at the University of Edinburgh and he chose selfhood (or personal identity) as his main topic. These lectures would evidently later become *Oneself as Another*, the book that, in a way, changes almost everything. With a notorious difference though: whereas Ricœur's Gifford Lectures, which are an early sketch of the first studies of *Oneself as Another*, ended with two studies pertaining to Biblical hermeneutics ("The Self in the Mirror of the Scriptures" and "The Mandated Self") and that were later republished in the latest version of *Amour et Justice*, Ricœur decided to leave these two texts out of *Oneself as Another*. Instead, he replaced them with his tenth study, which is an attempt to devise a postponed and even agnostic ontology.

Now, *Oneself as Another* was meant to be a sort of condensed version of Ricœur's overarching contributions to philosophy, with the novelty being that they would be encapsulated in a new version of his philosophical anthropology, stemming around selfhood, identity and a theory of capacities, of what we are able to do. It could have been his definitive work, but it was not. Actually, it was followed by a very intense period of publication that lasted 14 years, almost up until his demise. Ricœur literally wrote *up to death*. Even in conditions of very fragile health, he kept on writing the fragments which make up a large portion of *Living Up to Death*. And in the meantime, before his death and after *Oneself as Another*, he published the two volumes on the just, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, *The Course of Recognition*, as well as an astounding number of articles, and books in form of direct dialogic exchanges, such as the interviews that make up *Critique*

and *Conviction* and his debate with Jean-Pierre Changeux.¹⁴⁶⁶

In my opinion, Dosse indeed captures well this period when he decides to call the section of his biography dealing with the last period of Ricœur's production "Le philosophe dans la cité"; and "in the city" here means dealing with problems pertaining to the city, to politics in the broadest term, to *praxis*.¹⁴⁶⁷ In the volumes on the just, in his discussions on bioethics, in his incursions in historiography what Ricœur is doing is discussing the problems of *his* time. And when I say discussing, I really mean what I say; this was not the isolated philosopher, speaking *ex cathedra*. Quite the contrary, these reflections are almost always the result of Ricœur's lively, engaged debates with jurists, doctors, historians, neuroscientists and so forth. It is as if in this period, the quest for the "enlarged standpoint" and for the appropriation of the perspectives of others through mediations and debates was even more intensified at a personal level. Furthermore, there is also a growing decentering, because it seems to me that as years went by, Ricœur was less interested in encapsulating the perspectives of others in his own standpoint, and consequently even more willing to let his thought be guided by the specialized work of others (hence his engagement with jurists, and so on). His stance was the opposite of the arrogance of reason. Even though he diagnosed, acknowledged and resorted to "conflict" so many times, as I have been showing almost exhaustively, his position of humble listening was omnipresent.

In my view, this emphasis on practical philosophy (if indeed we can find a domain capable of encapsulating his main productions in this last period) is actually the sign of a return. Many times in Ricœur's philosophy we find ternary structures. This is clear, for instance, in his little ethics of *Oneself as Another*. It is perhaps an influence of Hegelian dialectics, even though we know since part one of this thesis the reservations that Ricœur expresses towards Hegelianism. Now, I think that such a ternary movement can be found in here too. As we recall from the third part of this thesis, in the first stage of the course of conflict Ricœur's main topic was existence. After the mediation of the linguistic and hermeneutic

¹⁴⁶⁶ See Jean-Pierre Changeux and Paul Ricœur, *What Makes Us Think? A Neuroscientist and a Philosopher Argue about Ethics, Human Nature, and the Brain*, translated by M. B. DeBevoise (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002).

¹⁴⁶⁷ For a presentation of Ricœur's philosophy from the angle of his practical engagements and the development of a practical philosophy, see Marcelino Agís Villaverde, *Conocimiento y razón práctica. Un recorrido por la filosofía de Paul Ricœur* (Salamanca: Kadmos, 2011).

detour, it is as if Ricœur comes back to practical problems. It is as if he comes full circle. Not a closed circle, evidently. And not exactly to the same problems; certainly, to different problems and using different language games, but in the neighborhood of the first ones.

At this point in time Ricœur scarcely speaks about existence, but he speaks of selfhood. He does not dare to undertake a direct ontology, but he still seeks to sketch an ontology, even though a postponed, mediated one. The problems of action come to haunt him once again, even though he now has different tools and theories to deal with them. He still maintains a critical perspective, conflicts are still at the heart of his thought, but now he has traversed the political philosophy of the 20th century, reflected upon Arendt, Rawls, Walzer and so many others, as we have seen in part two. In fact, in *Living up to Death* we even find an attempt at a philosophy of life, actually very close to existential meditation after all. Clearly, this is not to be considered a vicious circle, or proof that there was no evolution in Ricœur's thought. Nor is it a strict supersession in the Hegelian sense. It is perhaps proof that even though his thought evolved, some questions and topics were recurrent. They came back, transformed, in a kind of hermeneutic recovery perpetually reinterpreted.

As such, in this final stage of the course of conflict I will mention a host of forms of practical conflict. Firstly, I will show the final form of his hermeneutics of the self in *Oneself as Another*, where attestation of selfhood has to struggle to impose itself over and above suspicion. Then I will enter Ricœur's little ethics and traverse the entire region of the conflict of duties and norms, under the banner of the tragic of action and its many conflicts, including political ones. After that, I will delve in detail in Ricœur's incursions in applied ethics and mainly in the judicial domain in the two books on the just. This interest also has a biographic motivation, namely the close connection with Antoine Garapon and his Institut des Hautes Études sur la Justice (IHEJ). From there I will proceed to reconstruct Ricœur's social philosophy, intrinsically connected with his political philosophy. Finally, I will end with his take on recognition, slightly different from the Hegelian and Honnethian direct identification with conflict and struggle. After this stage, the "course of conflict" and my traversal of Ricœur's philosophy will have ended, and I will afterwards proceed to my systematization and critical remarks.

5. 1 – The Conflicted Self, Part Two: Suspicion vs. Attestation. Towards the Capable Human Being (Philosophical Anthropology)

5.1.1 – Selfhood and the capacities: being able to describe, narrate and prescribe

Throughout this thesis, I have mentioned many times *Oneself as Another*, somewhat anticipating the fuller account of it that I am going to offer in three of the chapters which comprise this part. This is partly due to the fact that *Oneself as Another* is probably the single, most important book in Ricœur's production. Now, this is the difference between *Oneself as Another* and the preceding books: whereas all the other dealt with specific questions and were, in a way, circumstantial answers to well delimited problems that Ricœur encountered, this book has a somewhat more encompassing character. In it, his previous incursions in phenomenology, analytic philosophy, narrative theory and literary criticism are all somewhat integrated.

Be that as it may, the book also revolves around a specific question: that of the existence of what in the English-speaking world has come to be known as the *self* or, if we prefer, the question of selfhood (or still, as Ricœur puts it, of *ipseity*).¹⁴⁶⁸ Except that all his preceding investigations come to be unified by this particular question. Who am I? – or, better put, who is the self?

Of course that this major work does not restrict itself to summing up Ricœur's decisive contributions. It also includes much new material, especially the discussions with analytical philosophy (the debates with Davidson and Parfit, for instance) and, more significantly, his own sketch of an ontology revolving around the crucial capacity of *attestation*. Let us follow the thread of Ricœur's argument.

First of all, if the matter is personal identity, why talk about the "self" and not the "I" or, more simply, about "me"? Ricœur sees in the use of a reflexive pronoun (the *soi* that becomes the *se* in French, much like in the other Latin languages, the himself or herself in English) a grammatical support for his

¹⁴⁶⁸ For a very detailed account of the topic of ipseity and alterity throughout basically the entire works of Ricœur at least up until *Oneself as Another*, see the two volumes of Joaquim de Sousa Teixeira, *Ipseidade e Alteridade. Uma Leitura da Obra de Paul Ricœur* (Lisboa: INCM, 2004). The notion of *ipse*, of course, precedes Ricœur and is perhaps an offshoot of modernity. For a very good reconstruction of the topic of ipseity in Kant, see Paulo Jesus, *Poétique de l'ipse. Étude sur le je pense kantien* (Bern: Peter Lang, 2008).

reflective philosophy. As before, Ricœur wants to posit the need for a detour in order to reach the self, that is “the primacy of reflective meditation over the immediate positing of the subject”.¹⁴⁶⁹ He sees his philosophy as being placed halfway between a “shattered” or even non-existent Cogito (such as it is described in the various strands of the philosophy of suspicion, including its Postmodern variants, or even in the skeptical tradition stemming from Locke and Hume and extending to Derek Parfit) and the self-positing of a sovereign, almost solipsistic Cogito, that is immediately certain as in Descartes’s philosophy, or even self-producing as in Fichte. Therefore, his “hermeneutics of the self” ultimately derives consciousness (and conscience) formation from intersubjectivity. Interaction with others and self-knowledge are mediated by a process of the interpretation of tradition aided by the sciences. This was already apparent in the first phase of his hermeneutics of the self, but the detour is somewhat extended in this second stage.

Now, one of Ricœur’s main claims consists in asserting, over against a certain tendency in Postmodern thought – that tends to consider notions of self or identity as purely illusory – that it is possible to maintain the existence and pertinence of personal identity if we consider it in the sense of the Latin *ipse*, and not of *idem*. Basically, this comes down to accepting a certain kind of identity that persists in time but without, as it were, a metaphysical unchanging core. Usually, when Ricœur uses the word selfhood, he is directly designating *ipse*-identity, while he reserves “sameness” for *idem*-identity.

Finally, the use of the expression “Oneself as Another” indicates that the self that we are talking about here is intersubjectively constituted and so that there is a particular dialectic between self and other, and between activity and passivity, ipseity and otherness. All the complicated aspects of this dialectic become apparent in Ricœur’s last chapter of this book.

He also chooses to define the self as the one who is able to respond to the question *who?*, namely, *who am I* (or, in the neutral version, *who is the self?*). He reserves the question *what* for the topic of sameness; because the self is not a thing, he cannot ask, *what am I*; if he or she did, this would be tantamount to an admission of reification, as Luckács and Honneth would put it. Therefore, the whole book can be seen as responding to this question by undertaking a

¹⁴⁶⁹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 1.

subdivision of the subject's *capacities*. Who is the self, and how can we be sure that he or she exists? In this book, the question is more like: what is he or she capable of? And Ricœur turns the question around, by starting from a list of basic capacities, those defining every capable human being; he asks "Who is speaking? Who is acting? Who is recounting about himself or herself? Who is the moral subject of imputation?"¹⁴⁷⁰ And to all these questions Ricœur answers: the self. He or she who is able to speak, act, narrate his or her life, and be held accountable by his or her moral actions. This progression also reveals another one, which consists in the main topics of the different chapters of the book: describing, narrating, prescribing.

So the whole book takes the detour of the philosophy of language (semantics and pragmatics), the philosophy of action, hermeneutics and moral theory, in order to later culminate in an ontology. It is important to note that in this philosophical anthropology that determines *who the self is*, ontology is not taken as a given, as an a priori determination. Rather, Ricœur submits reflection to analysis, to the detour of philosophy and the human sciences, in order to take the results of those investigations as determining who the self *actually* is. In this sense, we can take it to be an investigation, an inquiry or research, in the literal meaning of these terms. As he puts it: "*The recourse to analysis (...) is the price to pay for a hermeneutics characterized by the indirect manner of positing the self*".¹⁴⁷¹ The way to the self, one could say, is indirect; but there is a way nonetheless and at the end, what we have learnt in the process of arriving there, is able to give us a clearer picture of who (not what) the self is.

Even though the book has a systematic style, Ricœur insists that its studies are constitutively fragmentary, and that they only have a "thematic unity" which is provided by their dealing with *human action*.¹⁴⁷² In a way, even though the book has a lot of "theoretical" content, what Ricœur seems to be aiming when writing is at a "practical philosophy". As such, the conflicts with which it deals are mainly "practical conflicts", as would be almost all the conflicts he analyzed from this moment on, also in his later books.

The last study – whose ontology, Ricœur asserts multiple times, is

¹⁴⁷⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 16.

¹⁴⁷¹ *Ibid.*, p. 17.

¹⁴⁷² *Ibid.*, p. 19.

“fragmentary” – aims at developing an ontology of potency, somewhat inspired by Aristotle’s *dynamis*, and where the specific being of humans is depicted as being defined by its potentialities and acts. It is, fundamentally, an ontology of our capacities. Ultimately, this would end up in what Ricœur calls attestation, which is, for him, our modality of being, and that corresponds to something like a veritative – or, if we prefer the Heideggerian term, an *alethic* – mode of existing, which has an epistemic status somewhat weaker than absolute certainty, but certainly stronger than suspicion. Ricœur affirms that attestation belongs to the grammar of “I believe-in”.¹⁴⁷³ And in what do I believe, could we ask? The answer is: I believe in myself, and in my power to act.

And it is here that a fundamental conflict is unveiled. We have seen before how in Ricœur’s first hermeneutic of the self, consciousness formation was itself a process, and how this process ultimately unfolded in the great conflict between archaeological and teleological consciousness. At that point in time, the opposite of suspicion was recovery or recollection of meaning. In the second stage of the hermeneutics of the self – and of self-formation through conflict – there is a slight shift in the way the process is described. In fact, now the opposite of suspicion is attestation. And this because all the capacities hitherto described always face the possibility of being put under suspicion: am I really able to act? To speak? To narrate?, and so forth. In fact, these are *vulnerable* capacities, and activity has its dialectical counterpart in passivity. Ricœur does not deny that suspicion is possible; but he does see attestation as the solution to it:

This vulnerability will be expressed in the permanent threat of suspicion, if we allow that suspicion is the specific contrary of attestation. The kinship between attestation and testimony is verified here: there is no “true” testimony without “false” testimony. But there is no recourse against false testimony than another that is more credible; and there is no recourse against suspicion but a more reliable attestation.¹⁴⁷⁴

A more reliable attestation. This latter passage allows us to admit that there are degrees of attestation. And in fact Ricœur explicitly states that attestation as trust is tantamount to attestation of conscience, of *Gewissen*. Moral conscience

¹⁴⁷³ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

¹⁴⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

exists, and I am capable of *acting morally*; it is something other than an illusion. As such, if suspicion lurks, if I am subject to accusation, I can answer, like Levinas, *me voici*. Here I am. I am capable of responding for my own actions, and to act on your behalf, if needed. So what does attestation amount to? According to Ricœur:

And if one admits that the problematic of acting constitutes the analogical unity within which all of these investigations are grouped, attestation can be defined as the assurance of being oneself acting and suffering.¹⁴⁷⁵

Now this assurance of “being acting and suffering” is the attestation of being oneself, through all the *peripeteiai* of human existence.

The next few chapters will unfold a fundamental locus of conflict for Ricœur, the one that takes place in moral life and is later extended to legal theory, facing conflicts of laws (both at a moral level, where what are in conflict are moral duties, or at a strictly judicial level) that will be solved, when possible, by phronetical means. However, in order to fully analyze the conflict between suspicion and attestation, I will reverse Ricœur’s order of argumentation, skipping to his conclusion right away.

5.1.2 – The attestation of the self (a postponed ontology)

In the last study of *Oneself as Another*, titled “What ontology in view?” (or maybe, in an alternative translation, “Towards what ontology?”, *vers quelle ontologie?*), Ricœur defines attestation as “the assurance that each person has of existing as the same in the sense of ipseity, of selfhood”.¹⁴⁷⁶

However, he argues that “assurance” is something more than a merely epistemic order. He places his investigation under the aegis of Aristotle’s meta-categories of being-true and being-false, and he re-reads his whole philosophical style through this lens. He asserts that his *mediation* of reflection by analysis is attested as being-true, because it is “objectification” that grants a “*realist twist*”¹⁴⁷⁷

¹⁴⁷⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 298.

¹⁴⁷⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

to what could have otherwise been a purely idealistic construction. He thus seems to consider that analytic philosophy and its fine, detailed analyzes are what keeps him, in a way, close to reality, in a first approach (and mentions Strawson's and Frege's insistence on reference, as well as Davidson's analyzes of events).

His ontology is given a second support, he argues, by the hermeneutical insistence on building a transcendentalism able to ground these detailed analyzes and establish hierarchies among them (a point that, as we have seen, he had made earlier, in the "Discours de l'Action"). He further extends his ontological realism to the domain of languages that seem the least referential, reaffirming once again the *ontological vehemence* of language, even in the domains of the metaphoric and the poetic, as he had done in the 1970s and 1980s.

In order to ground this alethic dimension of language, he seeks confirmation in Aristotle's claim according to which the meanings of Being are analogical. Furthermore, Aristotelian ontology seems suited to Ricœur's philosophical anthropology, since the pair *dynamis-energeia* is capable of ontologically grounding both an emphasis on human action and its transformative possibilities.¹⁴⁷⁸ He further connects this with Spinoza's notion of *conatus* – noting in passing that he wrote very little on Spinoza, some say that to leave that subject to his friend Sylvain Zac who he mentions in this book¹⁴⁷⁹ – arguing that action is anchored in life. As he had done before with Nabert, he reasserts that life, and existence, are the "effort to exist". And we might recall how this provided him with the force to say yes, in spite of the sorrow of finitude, as we have seen in *Fallible Man*.

Nonetheless, it goes without saying that Ricœur's philosophical anthropology is not a mere voluntarist affirmation of one's power to act. Indeed, he inscribes the self and its powers in an intricate and complicated dialectic with many different foci. On the one hand, activity is mixed with passivity and suffering. On the other hand, selfhood or ipseity cannot be understood without alterity and intersubjectivity. Alterity, in turn, can also be taken to constitute a kind of passivity, it becomes a part of what Ricœur calls a "triad of passivity"¹⁴⁸⁰, that is, a depiction of three fundamental levels of passivity inscribed in our ipseity

¹⁴⁷⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 304.

¹⁴⁷⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 315.

¹⁴⁸⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 318.

itself.

According to Ricœur, passivity is also polysemic. As such, the attestation of the point of connection between ipseity and the alterity which resides in us is “the object of an *attestation that is broken*, in the sense that the otherness joined to selfhood is attested to only in a wide range of dissimilar experiences, following a diversity of centers of otherness”.¹⁴⁸¹ He chooses to emphasize three such experiences: one’s own body, our “flesh” (*Leib*) as the mediator between the self and the world; the foreign, that is, the other with whom I enter into an intersubjective relationship; and finally the experience of conscience, of *Gewissen*.

I will not delve into the details of this threefold passivity, for lack of space. I will just say that even though these are disperse experiences, they can all be said to *exist*, in the factual (*faktisch*) sense of the word: I have a body, I am in a relation with others, and I hear my conscience. Consequently, even though I might doubt many things, even though suspicion lurks and I am conflicted, I can say that I exist in the mode of ipseity. And this not only because, as Ricœur contends, I am able to exercise my capabilities – for instance, to tell my story or to hold the ethical capacity of keeping promises through time – but because even the attestation of passivity is factual.

Ultimately, this has interesting corollaries for Ricœur’s philosophical anthropology. As I said, the ontology of *Oneself as Another* is a postponed ontology. It only becomes apparent after the long detour. And attestation has to struggle through conflict with suspicion in order to assert itself. But when the debate is centered on conscience towards the last pages of the book, there is one level in which Ricœur decides to stop. That is, he attests the factual existence of conscience but, *qua* philosopher, he refuses to determine whence it comes.

Firstly, he asserts that it is in the phenomenon of conscience that we find that the attestation of selfhood is inseparable from an exercise of suspicion.¹⁴⁸² And this because, as we might recall, it is precisely the possibility of conscience as a lie that Nietzsche and the other interpreters of suspicion put forward. Consequently, we “enter the problematic of conscience by the gate of *suspicion*.”¹⁴⁸³ Ricœur also asserts that “conscience is that place par excellence in

¹⁴⁸¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸² *Ibid.*, p. 341.

¹⁴⁸³ *Ibid.*

which illusions about oneself are intimately bound up with the veracity of attestation”.¹⁴⁸⁴ As we already know, the way through to the “true” cogito is a way of dispossession, of shattering our narcissist features. A “broken” or a “wounded”¹⁴⁸⁵ cogito is a more realistic one.

Ricœur recalls the critiques of Hegel, Nietzsche and Heidegger to the “good conscience” and evokes how they lead to a certain “demoralization of conscience”¹⁴⁸⁶ that is, an attestation of conscience as being “beyond good and evil”. However, he chooses to emphasize a different aspect. Namely, the phenomenon of “injunction” as being constitutively tied up with that of conscience. Conscience enjoins me. And in this being-enjoined, I feel a deep experience of otherness *within* myself. The metaphor of voice, of hearing, is here appropriate. Listening to the voice of conscience is tantamount to being enjoined by an other.¹⁴⁸⁷ Ricœur goes so far as speaking of “*being enjoined as the structure of selfhood*”.¹⁴⁸⁸ This depiction is of the utmost importance because if it is correct, it means that we are constitutively made up of a mode of specific interaction. Ready to hear. To be summoned. And eventually to answer. Not monads anymore. Which is not without important, and positive, outcomes.

However, the end of this book is very interesting, because Ricœur chooses to leave unanswered the questions about the origin of this injunction and identity of the one (or, better put, the other) who puts it forward. He expresses this very forcefully:

Perhaps the philosopher as philosopher has to admit that one does not know and cannot say whether this Other, the source of the injunction, is another person whom I can look in the face or who can stare at me, or my ancestors for whom there is no representation, to so great an extent does my debt to them constitute my very self, or God – living God, absent God – or an empty place. With this aporia of the Other, philosophical discourse comes to an end.¹⁴⁸⁹

¹⁴⁸⁴ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁵ On this topic of the “wounded cogito” see the excellent account provided by Jeanne Marie Gagnebin. See Jeanne Marie Gagnebin, “Uma filosofia do *cogito ferido*: Paul Ricœur” in *Estudos Avançados* 11/30 (1997): 261-272.

¹⁴⁸⁶ Ricœur *Oneself as Another.*, p. 351.

¹⁴⁸⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁴⁸⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 354.

¹⁴⁸⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 355.

With this rather paradoxical – even agnostic might we say – conclusion Ricœur's mediated ontology comes to a halt. As is easy to see, Ricœur's prudence regarding ontological claims came a long way. In his first books on Jaspers and Marcel he still dared to put forward direct ontological claims. Ever since the discovery of the great detour, and hermeneutics, in the mid-fifties to early sixties, his ontological claims became ever more mediated and toned down. This is the height of this humbling of ontology. Perhaps could we say that not only is there a wounded cogito in Ricœur's philosophy, but also, somehow, a wounded ontology. And yet, in the same manner there is a cogito, *after all, in spite of* the humiliation, the same can be said for ontology. But the imposing of limits – Kant, once again – and the refusal to objectify what properly cannot be known (or at least not empirically verified) is here reasserted. Ontology is spelled out, but reined in.

Amid all of this, the self is once again conflicted, but holding its own. He or she is certain of existing in the mode of ipseity, acting and suffering, choosing and being chosen. In a word: interacting.

5.2 – The Conflict of Duties (Ethics and Morality)

In the last chapter the ground was laid for us to understand the overall framework of *Oneself as Another*, with its affirmation of the self, mediated ontology and ultimately agnostic tone. Now I have to take a step back, in order to analyze the major instantiation of conflict in this book, one which opens up a whole new field in practical philosophy. I am alluding to the conflict of duties, or conflict of laws and which finds its application both in moral theory and in the Law. However, in order to do justice to this instantiation of conflict I will first have to spell out the main traits of Ricœur's "little ethics".

5.2.1 – Ricœur's "little ethics": ethics encompassing morality

The part of *Oneself as Another* to which Ricœur called with a certain affection his "little ethics" is a bold project, one in which he attempts to conciliate Aristotle's, Kant's and Hegel's ethical theories, which is no small feat. Ultimately, his is a neo-Aristotelian stance, affirming the primacy of the good over the right, and advocating a continuist approach between ethics and morality, as well as between is and ought, desires, convictions and norms.¹⁴⁹⁰

Allow me to briefly recall the main traits of this theory. Out of conventional reasons, Ricœur chooses to reserve for the term ethics the qualification of "that which is *considered to be good*" and to morality "that which *imposes itself as obligatory*".¹⁴⁹¹ His claim is threefold: that ethics enjoys primacy over morality (both *quoad se* and *quoad nos*: it is our first preoccupation, and it encompasses more than morality strictly speaking); that the ethical aim needs to be formalized, to "pass through the sieve of the norm"; finally, that the norm needs to go back to the ethical aim and to reinvent itself through phronetical means, whenever it reaches an impasse, coalesced under the figure of the "conflict of norms".

Confirming his knack for short, concise but encompassing formulae, Ricœur offers yet another of these definitions in his little ethics. According to him,

¹⁴⁹⁰ For a presentation of Ricœur's ethics, and its connection with hermeneutics, see Tomás Domingo Moratalla y Agustín Domingo Moratalla, *La ética hermenéutica de Paul Ricœur. Caminos de sabiduría práctica* (Valencia: Hermes, 2013).

¹⁴⁹¹ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 170.

the whole three studies and their theoretical ambitions could almost be summed up in his definition of the ethical aim, or ethical intention (*visée éthique*): “aiming at the ‘good life’ with and for others in just institutions”.¹⁴⁹² In this definition many aspects are emphasized. Firstly, the Aristotelian topic of the “good life” or “happiness” reveals itself as the first practical problem and also the ultimate goal in our lives. Secondly, it becomes clear that the self-esteem thereby revealed and consolidated in the quest for the good life, and which serves as a basis for our ipseity, is incomplete and constitutively flawed without an intersubjective mediation. Caring for the self also entails caring for the other, opening him or herself up to alterity, and recognizing how it is the other who constitutively also forms the self. In a word, self-esteem is complemented by its reciprocal counterpart of solicitude for the other. Finally, at a societal level this process would be incomplete without the anonymous third constituted by institutions, and their objective mediations and instantiations of our freedom, as Hegel put it. For Ricœur, to reiterate, this is all part of the ethical aim. This is what we want.

I cannot delve into the full details of this very rich and encompassing ethical theory. Suffice it to say that even though for Ricœur the ethical level is primordial, it would remain naïve, flawed and incomplete if it would not eventually be forced to pass the test of universalization. Desires to live well can be egoistic. They can be imperfectly formulated. They can infringe upon the autonomy of others. As such, an even though the tendentially universal moral norms do not deplete the surplus of meaning of ethical aims, Ricœur thinks that the moment of coercion, obligation and universalization cannot be escaped. As such, the transition to the second stage of the little ethics is marked by the transformation of the “good” by the “right”, that is, the “obligatory” and the “universal”.

5.2.2 – The moral norm

The ethical aim was marked by the development of self-esteem. In the second stage, what objective rights confer is self-respect (for Ricœur like, in a way, for Kant, and certainly for Honneth). In this stage, which corresponds to the

¹⁴⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 172.

eighth study of *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur's ethical theory acquires a greater degree of formalization. However, his claim, to be sure, is that there is a continuity between the teleological and the deontological levels. Namely, he argues that the moral norm and the rule of justice are nothing but the more abstract, formalized versions of the ethical aim and the sense of justice that each of us already possesses. In a very controversial and certainly unorthodox move, he contends that even Kant's categorical imperative is nothing but a formalization of the golden rule – which is, as we know, merely empirical, and so for Kant entirely *pathological* and not properly moral.

Ricœur's claim is that we can find, even in Kant, traces of this continuity. One of these traces is, according to him, Kant's insistence on the "good will" as the only thing that can be taken to be "good without qualification".¹⁴⁹³ Now, of course that Kant rejects all things empirical and pathological. The only feeling he accepts is "respect" as a "rational feeling" that amounts to an affection of reason by itself, a "humiliation" of sensibility and self-esteem. Obviously, Ricœur cannot agree with this. For him, self-respect is an objective ground on which to found self-esteem, a further exploration of the capabilities of the self on objective grounds. It is also an instantiation of the dialogic nature of the ethical aim, that is, of solicitude. And this because the golden rule can be seen as a first attempt at formulating a rule of reciprocity, one which the formalized moral, or legal norm will only, in the eyes of Ricœur, further develop.

However, it is when Ricœur comes to analyze the several formulations of Kant's categorical imperative that one of the most severe objections against Kant is formulated. On the one hand, duty is not "simple" as Kant claimed. That is, there might be situations in which I want to act morally, but in which I am not sure what exactly I should do, as we will see in the next section, on the "tragic of action". And Ricœur finds a very problematic tension in the respect for the moral law, and the respect for persons, in the framework of Kant's moral theory. Persons are supposed to be taken as ends in themselves. Kant draws our attention both to "my person" and "the person of anyone else". As such, with the mentioning of persons, plurality is inserted in the application of the imperative. But what would happen if by applying a law (even a moral one) I should be put in the position of

¹⁴⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 205.

disrespecting a particular person or group of people? This is what next section will analyze in detail.

As I stated before, Ricœur places Rawls in the continuity of Kant. His social contract theory is seen as a social extension of Kantian formalism. In this second level, the Rawlsian rule of justice expresses in the domain of social institutions the same normative requirement that Kantian autonomy demanded at a moral and individual level. Ultimately, such a formalization would lead Ricœur's ethical theory to the neighborhood of a purely procedural conception of justice. Nevertheless, his claim would always be that there is a "residue" of the teleological conception even in the most formalized forms of justice; and this is, in turn, and according to Ricœur, what allows justice to come back to the teleological aim when the deontological moment reaches an impasse. I already discussed in part two Ricœur's main objections to both Rawls's and Habermas's procedural approaches – the ahistorical pact is a fiction, autonomy is not so radical as we might think, the formalization process cannot eliminate all the vestiges of the thick conception of the good – so I will proceed directly to this impasse, which is the kernel of Ricœur's contention.

5.2.3 – The tragic of action, the conflict of duties and political conflicts

It is in the ninth study of *Oneself as Another*, "The Self and Practical Wisdom: *Conviction*"¹⁴⁹⁴ that we find the most important account of practical conflict in this seminal book. It is also, probably, the most serious account of conflict of the last stage of Ricœur's philosophy, because it is this model that would later be extended to encompass the theory of justice of both books dedicated to the topic of the just.

From the outset, Ricœur spells out what he is aiming to prove. According to him, in the complex relation between ethics and morality, and when faced with the aporias revealed by conflicts in morality, a renewed form of convictions is the only way out. This does not mean that the deontological point of view is to be completely discarded. On the contrary, "the very conflicts that are produced by the rigorousness of formalism give moral judgment in situation its true

¹⁴⁹⁴ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, pp. 240-296.

seriousness.”¹⁴⁹⁵ In what is a very significant and rare move in Ricœur’s production, he decides to place this ninth study under the banner of an interlude forcefully called “Tragic Action” (or, more precisely, *The Tragic of Action*, *Le tragique de l’action*) which he dedicates to the tragic memory of his son Olivier.

Now, this interlude assumes a very specific status. Firstly, Ricœur chooses to “make a voice heard other than the voice of philosophy”¹⁴⁹⁶, that is, the voice of Greek tragedy. This voice is, for Ricœur, one of the most important “voices of nonphilosophy”. As such, it is not philosophy itself, but he believes that these other voices (religion being another example) can sometimes have something to teach to philosophy. Philosophy can let itself be guided, instructed by these others. And its role is in here clear: it is supposed to “restore to conflict the place that all the analyzes up to now [i.e., up until that part of *Oneself as Another*] have avoided granting to it”.¹⁴⁹⁷ As I have been showing, conflict is almost omnipresent in Ricœur’s philosophy. But it is not always given thematic attention. With this last assertion what we find is probably Ricœur’s first explicit emphasis on conflict and its revealing power since the depiction of the conflict of interpretations in the first phase of his hermeneutic theory.

Ricœur is careful enough to avoid a full equivalence between philosophy and Greek tragedy. Tragedy resists, he tells us, a complete “repetition” – the French word is “répétition”, that is, the famous re-enactment he invoked in the *Symbolism of Evil*, when reflecting on what the experience of evil meant for the philosophical consciousness – in the discourse of ethics or morality. Tragedy is probably inescapable. But as such the powers it unleashes are almost too much for philosophical discourse to bear. Philosophical discourse is not tragic discourse; but tragedy is put here precisely in order to rein in on the over-rationalization and exacerbated optimism of philosophical formalism. Tragedy is here to recall us that sometimes following the law is complicated and that we might be faced with hard cases, hard choices. The ones where no option is good.

In order to illustrate – I think this word is here exactly appropriate – this claim Ricœur chooses to delve into the *Antigone*, rather than in *Oedipus Rex*, which is what he had done before in *Freud and Philosophy*. And the fact that he

¹⁴⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 240.

¹⁴⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁴⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

does so is testimony, once again, to his recurrent return to Hegel. The narrative of *Antigone* is well known. Polyneices, Antigone's brother, dies in battle in Thebes's civil war. The ruler of the winning party, Creon (who is Antigone's uncle) decides Polyneices cannot be buried, because as a rebel he is considered a traitor. Creon represents positive law, the law of the city; as such, according to his rule, Polyneices must be dishonored and left to rot, as it were. But Antigone decides to oppose her uncle's ruling. Claiming the binding power of tradition and holy law, she opposes Creon's ruling and eventually ends up burying Polyneices; her tragic faith, as is known, is to be buried alive as a consequence of her actions. She eventually commits suicide, in spite of Creon's repentance. The tragedy is thus seen as displaying the hubris of those who want to rule over and above divine law. Creon commits such a sin, and falls in disgrace.

Ricœur sees in this tale the perfect example of two opposing laws: the law of the city and divine law; and he chooses to analyze things from Antigone's viewpoint. Faced with the decision to bury or not to bury her brother, what should she do? This is, indeed a choice between the "bad" and the "worse", a grey area, as it were. From this analysis, Ricœur draws a metatheoretical consequence, and one which confirms our insistence on conflict throughout this thesis. According to him, conflicts are persistent in human life; and one comes to be oneself through a traversal of them:

If the tragedy of *Antigone* can teach us something, it is because the very content of the conflict – despite the lost and unrepeatable character of the mythical ground from which it emerges and of the festive environment surrounding the celebration of the spectacle – has maintained an ineffaceable permanence. The tragedy of *Antigone* touches what, following Steiner, we can call the agonistic ground of human experience, where we witness the interminable confrontation of man and woman, old age and youth, society and the individual, the living and the dead, humans and gods. Self-recognition is at the price of a difficult apprenticeship acquired over the course of a long voyage through these persistent conflicts, whose universality is inseparable from their particular localization, which is, in every instance, unsurpassable.¹⁴⁹⁸

That self-recognition must come at the price of a "difficult apprenticeship", indeed

¹⁴⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

a course, over these persistent conflicts, is a strong claim. Allow me to find in it a metaphor for the revelation of Ricœur's philosophy in this thesis, and namely in the three parts of the "course of conflict" properly speaking. This is the place where conflict is granted more generative power in the context of Ricœur's practical philosophy. If, in the theoretical and hermeneutical level, it was the conflict of interpretations which had creative power, in the practical level it is the conflict of duties or norms which reveals us something: the hardship of life and its instruction, leading up to a difficult, and yet existent, recognition of oneself even amid these conflicts. In a way, this is a radical claim that will find no parallel elsewhere in Ricœur's philosophy, not even in *The Course of Recognition*, where the study dealing with the "recognition of oneself" is constructed in very different terms. In this and connected passages in *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur speaks about the "unavoidable nature of conflict in moral life"¹⁴⁹⁹ and lauds its capacity to "outline a wisdom", namely, tragic wisdom.

However, as always, for Ricœur, there is more to it than the mere admission or recognition of conflicts. They are not, in themselves, fully eliminable but that does not mean that they are intractable. Indeed, he suggests that they are "open to negotiation"¹⁵⁰⁰ which reminds us of Foucault's observations about the possibility of "negotiating" our identities, even amid the complicated processes of subjectification. Ricœur's tragic wisdom is not, or at least not only, a "resignation to the insoluble". On the contrary, Ricœur claims that even though conflicts are unavoidable, there must be a way to reply to them. And it is in that context that he calls for practical wisdom.

He argues that the two main protagonists, Antigone and Creon, have a strategy of avoidance of conflicts. As such, their perspective is "narrow". It goes without saying that Ricœur is choosing to place himself in the position of the one who tries to develop an enlarged perspective, in the sense I defined above with the help of Kant, even though in this particular instance he is more or less following Hegel's interpretation of the *Antigone*. The difference between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom is that tragedy itself leaves the conflict unresolved. Man is crushed because of the hubris. But this is why a gap between philosophy and tragedy exists, and why we are left to reinvent some response to the tragedy that

¹⁴⁹⁹ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁰⁰ *Ibid.*

befalls upon us:

One of the functions of tragedy in relation to ethics is to create a gap between tragic wisdom and practical wisdom. By refusing to contribute a “solution” to the conflicts made insoluble by fiction, tragedy, after having disoriented the gaze, condemns the person of praxis to reorient action, at his or her own risk, in the sense of a practical wisdom in situation that best *responds* to tragic wisdom. This response, deferred by the festive contemplation of the spectacle, makes conviction the haven beyond catharsis.¹⁵⁰¹

The meaning of “at his or own risk” is here that one is left to seek a solution, to invent one, as it were, without however being able to anticipate its result, or to find it in any pre-established procedure. Conviction is here only hope.

After the interlude, in the more specifically philosophical and argumentative part of this ninth study of *Oneself as Another*, Ricœur systematically detects conflict and applies its generative power to the level of institutions, respect and autonomy. He states that conflict “is the goad that sends us to this court of appeal in three areas (...) the universal self, the plurality of persons and the institutional environment”.¹⁵⁰² These are, indeed, inversed orders. But he chooses to follow the order institutions-respect-autonomy. In so doing, he recovers Hegel’s theory of institutions and namely the thick notion of *Sittlichkeit*. This allows him to discuss political practice and the conflicts pertaining to it.

On the one hand, the problems of distribution and apportionment of social goods which occupy Rawls are inherently conflictual. This is why Ricœur chooses to characterize Rawls’s take on society as inherently consensual-conflictual, as I mentioned in part two. He discusses in passing Walzer’s criticism of Rawls, and mentions the need to arbitrate the conflict between spheres of justice as one striking example of social conflict.¹⁵⁰³

In the pages that follow, Ricœur analyzes the possibility of solving that conflict through Hegelian means, since the theory of objective spirit seems in principle to be able to provide the mediations and hierarchizations that would solve the problem. The first step to achieve it, is a step which Ricœur decides to take and that brings him closer to a post-metaphysical interpretation: namely, he

¹⁵⁰¹ *Ibid.*, p. 247.

¹⁵⁰² *Ibid.*, pp. 249-250.

¹⁵⁰³ *Ibid.*, p. 252.

decides to recover the notion of *Sittlichkeit* without the ontology of *Geist*.¹⁵⁰⁴ The part of Hegel which Ricœur here refuses is the objective spirit in the strictest of its meanings, that is, the State in its metaphysical form, self-knowing State as self-knowing Spirit. That also allows us to avoid the reification of different forms of *Sittlichkeit*, i.e., even though collective identities exist, they are changing and adapting, they can absorb critiques and transform themselves as a result of them.

First and foremost, the possibility of a “deadly” *Sittlichkeit* must be curtailed.¹⁵⁰⁵ This means that the invasion and domination of a *Volk* over another is not justifiable in itself, not even disguised as a “cunning of reason”. This is for us, today, self-evident. But Ricœur grounds it theoretically in the distinction between legitimate and illegitimate uses of power, as he had done before in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. He recalls the distinction between power in common and power over (domination), invoking Arendt. Political practice is a locus of specific conflicts because the exercise of power is elusive. The desire to live together is the most fundamental of desires, and entails the exercise of a specific, legitimate power. But that kind of reciprocal, symmetric use of power can turn to asymmetric relations of domination. And these, in turn, need to be reined in.

As such, the exercise of power is itself described as being inherently conflictual. Consequently, even within the scope of a thick *Sittlichkeit*, the apportionment of power and roles needs to be addressed. And if we are to avoid that conflict turns to violence, one way to deal with it is through discussion. This provides Ricœur with the opportunity to claim that a type of Aristotelian phronesis, one able to make decisions, is needed to correct the conflictual processes taking place within different forms of *Sittlichkeit*. This leads him to seek a definition of democracy not far from that of Claude Lefort; according to Ricœur we should not seek a consensus that would simply end conflicts (this is impossible). What we need is to negotiate conflicts:

It is useless – when it is not actually dangerous – to count on a consensus that would put an end to the conflicts. Democracy is not a political system without conflicts but a system in which conflicts are open and negotiable in accordance with recognized rules of

¹⁵⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 255.

¹⁵⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 256.

arbitration. In a society that is ever more complex, conflicts will not diminish in number and in seriousness but will multiply and deepen. For the same reason, the free access of the pluralism of opinions to public expression is neither an accident nor an illness nor a misfortune; it is the expression of the fact that the public good cannot be decided in a scientific or dogmatic manner.¹⁵⁰⁶

Now, this strikes me as being a very balanced and accurate position. Ricœur puts forward the need for a pluralism of opinions and he is inherently anti-dogmatic. The public good cannot be determined “scientifically”, as it were. It is rather the result of a choice and one which must be democratically taken. As such, conflicts in opinion are inevitable, but they are to be solved by deliberation and collective decision-making. An overall consensus is probably a sham. But if the “rules of arbitration” are agreed upon, even though “conflicts will multiply and deepen” the resurgence of conflicts will probably be a sign of the vitality of a democracy, not its decay. Indeed, the opposite would be true. A totally consensual society would probably be a dead society, operating at a standstill. Again, we find the positive role of conflicts in society: they bring vitality to what would otherwise be a moribund order.

The second order of conflicts analyzed by Ricœur is what properly defines the conflict of duties. He decides to explore, as I hinted at before, a possible tension in Kant’s categorical imperative. This tension is between the universalist version of the imperative (respect the idea of humanity, follow the moral rule in any circumstance whatsoever) and its pluralist version (respect it as applicable to each and every person, who must be treated as an end in itself). Now this is the core of Ricœur’s objection:

The possibility of conflict arises, however, as soon as the otherness of persons, inherent in the very idea of *human* plurality, proves to be, in certain remarkable circumstances, incompatible with the universality of the rules that underlie the idea of humanity. Respect then tends to split up into respect for the law and respect for persons. Under these conditions, practical wisdom may consist in giving priority to the respect for persons, in the name of the solicitude that is addressed to persons in their irreplaceable singularity.¹⁵⁰⁷

¹⁵⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 258.

¹⁵⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 262.

This is the thick of his argument. In human affairs, sometimes we are divided, torn, between different options. Take Antigone's case: if she respects the law of the city she disrespects divine law, and vice versa. But her decision, was it not also a decision to *respect* the person of her brother, over and above the law of the city?

In a nutshell, Ricœur's claim is that as a rule of thumb, when respect for an allegedly universal law and respect for the situation of a given individual clash, priority should be given to respect for the person. This will probably not be the case in every specific occasion. As we will see in more detail in chapter 5.4 below, the important point is that there is no ready-made solution, or one-size-fits-all rule to follow. But generally speaking, people are above laws, this is the spirit of Ricœur's observation. Ultimately, this will serve to ground once again the deontological moment in teleology. It is not that rules are irrelevant, this has been sufficiently proven. But for Ricœur the notion of "respect for persons" is really grounded in solicitude. If we decide to place persons over and above the law, this is because solicitude is ultimately superior to the mere obligation to follow rules in general.

In this chapter, I will stop short of spelling out all the details of Ricœur's practical wisdom, because I think that this conflict of norms gains in insight and extension when it is compared with legal (that is, both juridical and judiciary) forms of conflict, because Ricœur adapts a very similar model to the domain of the just. Because of this reason, I will now go straight to these forms of conflict developed after the publication of *Oneself as Another* in order to later come back to Ricœur's proposed solution, the invention of the rule, after having laid out the main traits of these conflicts.

5.3 – Legal Conflict (Theory of Justice)

As I mentioned before, in the 1990s Ricœur became interested in the topic of justice, mainly by being influenced by Antoine Garapon and the invitations to collaborate with the IHEJ. The deepening of his reflections ultimately led to the publication of many articles, the most important of which were republished in the two books which bear the predicate “just” in their title.

In this chapter I will focus mainly in the first of these books. The latter volume will prove more decisive in the next chapter. In *The Just* Ricœur mentions his main motivation for writing on those topics. He wanted “to do justice to the question of right and law, to do justice to justice.”¹⁵⁰⁸ But in order to do so he had to unveil a whole group of conflicts specifically pertaining to this order, and he had to put forward the mediations and procedures which would allow for these conflicts to be treatable.

According to Ricœur, the topic of the “just” introduces itself in both the orthogonal axes (the horizontal, dialogical constitution of the self and the vertical, hierarchical constitution of the predicates that qualify human actions in terms of morality)¹⁵⁰⁹ of the little ethics of *Oneself as Another*. That this is a book dealing with Ricœur’s theory of capacities and thus adding up to his philosophical anthropology is evident from the start, since he decides to put the article “Who is the Subject of Rights” at the opening of this collection.¹⁵¹⁰ This essay is complemented by a second one, entitled “The Concept of Responsibility. An Essay in Semantic Analysis”¹⁵¹¹ where he shows how the notion of responsibility is intrinsically connected to that of imputation which was one the main capacities emphasized in *Oneself as Another* and more specifically in the little ethics.

Let me follow the thread of the main conflicts dealt with here, which will reveal the specificities of the domain of the just in Ricœur’s philosophy.

¹⁵⁰⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 9.

¹⁵⁰⁹ Ricœur, *The Just*, p. xii.

¹⁵¹⁰ *Ibid.*, pp. 1-10.

¹⁵¹¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 11-35.

5.3.1 – Judicial intervention as a way to solve conflicts without violence

Ever since *History and Truth*, as we have seen in part three, the topic of peace is recurrent in Ricœur. In *The Just* he proposes an analogy which has its limitations, but that is put forward in order to emphasize the function proper to the judicial domain according to him. He argues that war is the insistent theme of political philosophy (even though war is perhaps a very specific topic; maybe we can say that conflict and struggle are in the semantic neighborhood of that notion) while peace is that of the philosophy of law. Accordingly, the long-standing goal of judicial intervention will be the maintenance of peace. But in order to do that, philosophy of law has to recognize the legitimate existence of conflicts and to find a proper way to deal with them:

If, in fact, conflict, and therefore, in some sense, violence, remains the occasion for judicial intervention, this can be defined by the set of means by which the conflict is raised to the rank of a trial process, this latter being in turn centered on a debate in words, whose initial incertitude is finally decided by a speech act that says what the law is and how it applies. Therefore there exists a place within society – however violent society may remain owing to its origin or to custom – where words do win out over violence. Yes, the parties to a trial do not necessarily leave the courtroom pacified. For that, they would have to be reconciled, they would have to have covered the path of mutual recognition to its end. The short-term effect of this act is to decide a conflict – that is, to put an end to uncertainty – whereas its long-term effect is to contribute to social peace – that is, to contribute finally to the consolidation of society as a cooperative enterprise.¹⁵¹²

This distinction between the short-term and the long-term goal of judicial intervention is indeed very important. On the one hand, its point of departure is the recognition of conflicts. These conflicts could be solved violently; the person who seeks reparation could instead choose to take vengeance. But what happens in a court of law, specifically when a sentence is reached, is an attempt to find a legitimate solution to that conflict. It is, as Ricœur puts it, “a speech act that says what the law is and how it applies”. That is, it is an act of language and an attempt at legitimacy, but one which ultimately produces effects. Maybe this does not

¹⁵¹² Ricœur, *The Just*, p. ix.

attain the status of mutual recognition – in order for this to take place, even the condemned person would have to recognize the justice of the condemnation and this is not, as we know, frequently the case – but this act will have accomplished its long-term goal if at least the litigants accept the outcome (even if they do not do so in a first instance, instead resorting to courts of appeal, and so forth, but that they ultimately recognize and yes, obey the final sentence). Because this will be proof that the justice system is there to impede utter mayhem and anarchy; it will show us that society, with all its flaws, still is a cooperative enterprise. This is the point Ricœur puts forward and spells out in more detail in the short but incisive article “The Act of Judging”.¹⁵¹³

In this latter article he develops in a more acute manner the path that goes from the short-term end to the long-term end of social peace. He argues that this long-term end is somewhat concealed, but that it is the long-term perspective that ultimately justifies the juridical system as such. He explicitly invokes Weil. If between discourse and violence one must choose, the act of judging, of emitting a judgment on some issue, means at the same time separating (*Ur-Teilen*), and deciding in a context that is discursive. By renouncing violence, the State of right chooses to solve its conflicts in a reasonable manner. Ricœur invokes indignation, the cry “unfair” as both a denunciation of injustice and an attestation of the peaceful way in which justice must be exercised. In this model Ricœur refuses to speak of reconciliation, but poses mutual recognition as a sort of limit idea that would attest to the reasonableness of the decision. Ultimately, each person would be given its own role, which is also its right place, its share in the division of roles that is a society. Hence Ricœur’s conclusion:

I conclude then that the act of judging has as its horizon a fragile equilibrium of these two elements of sharing: that which separates my share or part from yours and that which, on the other hand, means that each of us shares in, takes part in society.

It is the just distance between partners who confront one another, too closely in cases of conflict and too distant in those of ignorance, hate, and scorn, that sums up rather well, I believe, the two aspects of the act of judging. On the one hand, to decide, to put an end to uncertainty, to separate the parties; on the other, to make each party recognize the share

¹⁵¹³ Ricœur, *The Just*, pp. 127-132.

the other has in the same society, thanks to which the winner and the loser of any trial can be said to have their fair share in that model of cooperation that is society.¹⁵¹⁴

This article is indeed important to understand Ricœur's take on judicial and juridical conflicts. His definition of the "just distance" (which he shares with Garapon) would become paradigmatic of this approach. Maintaining this just distance itself involves a fragile equilibrium. This is a fundamental conflict, one that deals with particular procedures and that has a very important practical function. However, there are also other types of conflict present in *The Just*, which assume a more theoretical, but no less important role in this book.

5.3.2 – The conflict between argumentation and interpretation

One of Ricœur's goals in *The Just* is to determine the conceptual status of argumentation. However, when doing this, he does not attempt to hide his own hermeneutical background. As such, he decides to compare argumentation with the notion with which he is much better acquainted – interpretation. We have seen in part four how Ricœur defined interpretation as the result of a dialectic between explanation and understanding, and how this procedure was intrinsically creative: out of a polarity a new position was born. In the debate between the procedures of interpretation and argumentation he adopts a similar stance.

Hence in the article "Interpretation and/or Argumentation"¹⁵¹⁵ Ricœur sets out to dialectically define argumentation against the backdrop of interpretation. As is easy to see, "argument" is one of these notions with strong conceptual ties with conflict. It is, let us say, a rationalized form of conflict, with its own set of rules. Ricœur departs from a definition of argument as "a verbal battle without violence". Accordingly, the "clash of arguments" (a specific type of conflict) is deemed to be the major characteristic of what takes place during the processes taking place at a court of justice.

Adopting a move very characteristic of his style, he asks if we must "cling to a purely antinomial conception of the polarity of interpretation and argumentation or whether, [as he believes], we must attempt to elaborate a

¹⁵¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 132.

¹⁵¹⁵ Ricœur, *The Just*, pp. 109-126.

properly dialectical version of this polarity”.¹⁵¹⁶ Furthermore, he explicitly acknowledges that this is to be taken as a deepening of the relation between explanation and understanding. He takes as the representatives of the positions of interpretation and argumentation, respectively Ronald Dworkin (for interpretation) and Alexy and Atienza (for argumentation). According to him, juridical hermeneutic needs to draw from both sides. This attests that for him there is a partial analogy between juridical argumentation and the epistemology of argumentation; with the difference, however, that whereas in the domain of interpretation taken in its abstract level, what he have is always new conciliations, or fragile mediations (new combinations, really) which at each time produce a new interpretation, in the juridical plane, as we have seen, what we have as a result of the interpretation is a practical consequence: a decision, a sentence.

Ricœur’s substantive argument consists in saying that interpretation is the *organon* of inference. That is, it is the path followed by productive imagination in reflective judgment.¹⁵¹⁷ This means the following: in argumentation one usually puts forward facts and draws inferences from these facts. But there is, obviously, a to and fro from the fact and the theories that validate it. But sometimes general rules fail to encapsulate the particularity of the given case under consideration. That is, the universality of rules might have its problems and difficulties in the case of the law, no less than in the case of moral norms we have seen in the last chapter. Thus Ricœur invokes Dworkin’s allusion of “hard cases”, that is, those whose solution is not immediately apparent and which allows for “possible conflicts among norms”.¹⁵¹⁸ Indeed, and retrospectively, this notion of “hard cases” can equally be applied accurately to the case of the conflict of duties of *Oneself as Another*. The situation is the same, even though the domains change.

The fact is, Ricœur recalls, that the judge is not a legislator. What he does is to *apply* the law, “that is, he incorporates into his arguments the law in effect”.¹⁵¹⁹ But even this, he argues, constitutively relies on interpretation. When one resorts to jurisprudence, when one mentions “similar cases” the logical operation at stake is akin to interpretation: it is, according to Ricœur, the interpretation of an analogy. There is thus a double interpretation of laws and

¹⁵¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 109.

¹⁵¹⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁵¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 123.

¹⁵¹⁹ *Ibid.*

facts, because “we must always interpret at the same time the norm as covering a case and the case as covered”.¹⁵²⁰ Therefore, even in argumentation, there is interpretation.

In part four we have seen how Ricœur’s conclusion concerning the dialectic between explanation and understanding was that “to explain more is to understand better” and that in the hermeneutic arc one interpolates moments of explanation with moments of understanding in order to reach ever new and better interpretations. The process of reflective judgment, to which I will come back in the next chapter, is also a creative process of this sort. Because it makes use of productive imagination, because it needs to find, as it were, a new rule, it is a process of creation. And in creating it is, so to speak, interpreting and, in this this case, renewing the juridical domain.

5.3.3 – The conflict between conscience and the law

The last article of *The Just*, “Conscience and the Law. The Philosophical Stakes”¹⁵²¹ addresses yet another conflict, that between “subjective” conscience and the apparently objective character of the law. Nonetheless, and as often, Ricœur refuses to see in this a pure restrictive dichotomy. In order to escape a radical opposition, he proposes to distinguish a plurality of degrees of constitution of “the moral”. One of the most important contributions of the article though is to provide a further clarification on the moral judgment in situation, which will provide us a mediation towards the next chapter.

In a moral judgment in situation, in a way, what decides is our conviction; and this conviction is to a large extent determined by our conscience. However, as we shall see in a more detailed fashion below, conscience applies the case to a norm (or bluntly invents it). As such, both parties of this dialectic play a role here. Indeed, Ricœur states, “The tie between inner conviction and the speech act consisting in stating the law in a particular circumstance removes the judgment in situation from pure arbitrariness.”¹⁵²²

Finally, in a remark that sets the tone for his overall vision on these

¹⁵²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 122.

¹⁵²¹ Ricœur, *The Just*, pp. 146-155.

¹⁵²² *Ibid.*, p. 154.

matters, he states that in the tragic dimension of action, what is needed are fragile compromises because we are never choosing between black and white but rather between shades of gray. More often than not, this is a decision between bad and worse.¹⁵²³ In here, the “better” is tantamount to the “less bad”. Moreover, the better is only an “apparent better” because what we have here is conviction, not utter certitude. But let us see how this process unfolds in more detail in the next chapter.

¹⁵²³ *Ibid.*, p. 155.

5.4 – The Invention of the Rule (Applied Ethics)

In the last two chapters I provided a detailed account of the main instantiations of conflict to be found both in the moral and the juridical domain of Ricœur's philosophy. I also mentioned cursorily his admitted attempts to negotiate these conflicts, and namely by resorting to an invention of rules. However, I fell short of articulating in a more comprehensive manner how this worked, because I wanted to dedicate a full chapter to this creative proposal of Ricœur. Such as there are many conflicts tied up with the deontological moment of Ricœur's ethics, and with its judicial realm, so there is also a reflection on the procedures needed to solve or at least negotiate these conflicts. So now I will spell out these procedures, which always strive to mutually adequate rules to cases and vice-versa, but in slightly different manners. Firstly, I will sketch his Aristotelian solution to the conflicts of duties; secondly, I will articulate in a brief manner his insistence on reflective judgment on the judicial domain; lastly, I will mention his more applied incursions in "regional ethics", and specifically medical ethics, in his *Reflections on the Just*.

5.4.1 – Practical wisdom: adapting behavior through phronetical means

At the end of chapter 5.2 above I left Ricœur's little ethics at the point in which he detected in Kant's categorical imperative the possibility of a split between respect for the (moral) law and respect for persons; as we saw, there seemed to be a rule of thumb indicating that in case of doubt, preference should go to persons rather than the abstract law, also because respect for persons is ultimately grounded in solicitude as an inbuilt structure of the teleological desire to live well. Now what is practical wisdom, and how is it mobilized in these hard cases of our moral life? According to Ricœur, "Practical wisdom consists in inventing conduct that will best satisfy the exception required by solicitude, by betraying the rule to the smallest extent possible."¹⁵²⁴ As we can see, at this stage, the first approach is not so much one of directly inventing the rule, but of adapting it. As Ricœur clarifies, "Practical wisdom consists here in inventing just behavior

¹⁵²⁴ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 269.

suited to the singular nature of the case.”¹⁵²⁵ That is, Ricœur’s claim at this point is not so much that there is no rule guiding the particular case, but that *exceptions* to that rule might be admitted, depending on the case at hand.

Already in his little ethics, Ricœur conceives the possibility of extending his reflection to “applied” domains. The examples he chooses to illustrate this “invention of just behavior” are examples pertaining to bioethics. They are indeed inherently tied to life, and more specifically to its extremes: the “end of life” and the “beginning of life”. In the first one, Ricœur asks: shall we *always* tell the truth to the dying? Suppose the conditions of extreme frailty. We can either tell the truth without taking into account their capacity to bear such truth, or just lie, out of fear to aggravate the situation. According to Ricœur, this decision will depend on the evaluation of each case. There is no optimal solution here, and in each case different solutions might be taken. But this is not, he argues, simply arbitrary. Rather, it depends on “a meditation on the relation between happiness and suffering” and should not be taken lightly. Furthermore, at this stage, the exception is not really transformed in rule. Indeed, in the strictly moral domain, law, in the objective sense, is not an aid. He states

Even less should one legislate in an area where the responsibility for difficult choices cannot be made easier by laws. In such cases, one must have compassion for those who are morally or physically too weak to hear the truth. In certain other cases, one must know how to communicate this truth.¹⁵²⁶

As such what is needed is both moral responsibility (it is I who must decide what to do in each situation) and a certain sensibility, in order to know what is the decision that will better protect those who are in a fragile position. As Beatriz Contreras Tasso has shown in a very insightful manner, Ricœur is calling for the use of a very specific capacity, namely “tact”.¹⁵²⁷ Concerning the topic of the “beginning of life” and the complicated problem of knowing when does human life actually begin, and when is the right of abortion applicable, Ricœur follows the same principle and nuanced position: case by case evaluation, always with the

¹⁵²⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁵²⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵²⁷ See Beatriz Contreras Tasso, “Tacto, promesa y convicción: Conjunción ética de tradición e innovación en Paul Ricœur” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 2, 2 (2011): 33-47.

solicitude for the other in mind. When commenting on this delicate process, he goes so far as to speak of “moral invention”¹⁵²⁸ and of the need to conceive, conciliate and apply different rights – such as the right not to suffer, the right to protection, the right to be respected and so on – again according to the specificity of each case.

Ricœur’s conclusion then, as is easy to foretell, is that solicitude is ultimately the main criterion that must guide us in these hard case where respect for the law and respect for persons diverge. The solution to the conflicts of duties, rights and norms therefore is, in his little ethics, the application of a “situated judgment” guided by a “critical solicitude”.¹⁵²⁹ According to him, “this *critical solicitude* is the form that practical wisdom takes in the region of interpersonal conflicts.”¹⁵³⁰ As we can see, once again, the “critical” moment is placed between two stages of a different sort. Here, the moment of critique, embodied by norms and the test of universalization, is the mediating moment that allows naïve solicitude to become critical solicitude. The deontological test thus forces the teleological aim to mutate itself, to go through, so to speak, a process of instruction, a learning of its limits... but in order to be better equipped to decide and deal with everyday difficult situations. It is the coming of age of solicitude, might we say.

The last pages of Ricœur’s little ethics are a thick discussion of the problem of autonomy and universalization of rules, where he comes back to discuss once again Kant, Rawls, Apel and Habermas. I already alluded to this discussion in part two, and to the more definitive version it assumes in *Reflections on the Just*. Consequently, I will only recall here that for Ricœur it is only in a return to convictions that a truly ethical stance can take place. Therefore, the desire for the good life, later formalized and transmuted in the deontological moment, after having traversed the hard cases of the conflict of norms and having developed a critical solicitude and the capacity to decide, to formulate situated judgments... must ultimately come back to espouse his or her own (critical) convictions, those that have passed all the meaningful tests.

¹⁵²⁸ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 272.

¹⁵²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 273.

¹⁵³⁰ *Ibid.*

Ricœur mentions in passing the “stumbling search for solutions”¹⁵³¹ that sometimes characterizes our moral life. This only means that decisions are uncertain and not established a priori. Ultimately, Ricœur wants to encompass both universalism and contextualism, by not dropping universal demands and simultaneously forcing them to be context-sensitive. His last pages of this study are a plead for a “*reflective equilibrium between the ethics of argumentation and considered convictions*”.¹⁵³² There is evidently, in the democratic public scene, a conflict between convictions, including those that are “considered”. In order to solve this conflict by peaceful means, one is called to argue (as we can see, we have both Rawls and Habermas in this description). Accordingly, Ricœur claims, one of the forms that practical wisdom can assume is an “art of conversation”.¹⁵³³ Inchoate universals will only become “real universals” if they are mutually recognized in the concrete, thick contexts upon which they bear a claim. As Ricœur puts it, “the path of eventual consensus can emerge only from mutual recognition on the level of acceptability”.¹⁵³⁴

Ricœur’s little ethics is, as we have seen, traversed by conflicts, especially in its ninth study. Nonetheless, as he himself admits, his final aim is somewhat conciliatory. He states that the standpoint of practical wisdom is his ultimate goal, and that through it he seeks to somewhat reconcile “Aristotle’s *phronesis*, by way of Kant’s *Moralität*, with Hegel’s *Sittlichkeit*”.¹⁵³⁵ Of all the three influences felt in this group of studies comprising the little ethics the Aristotelian one is the more decisive. Ultimately, not only is a critical solicitude put forward, but also a critical *phronesis*. Accordingly, moral judgment in situation is described as a critical *phronesis* operating in the context of a more modest, non-metaphysical and toned down (but still thick and context-bound) *Sittlichkeit*. Ricœur also thinks that after the traversal of so many conflicts and mediations, this type of *phronesis* is safe from anomie. It has learned how conflictual this process is; and because of that, it is through debate, discussion and so forth that it puts forward its “considered convictions”. This is, as is easy to admit it, a very complex, and yet balanced model. Conflicts are not ignored, and yet they are not

¹⁵³¹ *Ibid.*, p. 285.

¹⁵³² *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁵³³ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

¹⁵³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 289.

¹⁵³⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 290.

left without a reply. Ricœur already hints at the invention of the rule as a result of situated judgment. However, his emphasis at this point in time is still more on the adaptation of behavior, and less in the creative refashioning of rules. A further step would be taken in the books dedicated to the just.

5.4.2 – A further degree of formalization: reflective judgment

As I hinted above, the greater degree of formalization of this process, where Ricœur indeed speaks about “inventing a rule” is thematically spelled out in *The Just*, and namely in “Interpretation and/or Argumentation”, when Ricœur uses Kant’s reflective judgment. He had already mentioned it before in the same book, in “Aesthetic Judgment and Political Judgment According to Hannah Arendt”¹⁵³⁶, which I briefly mentioned above, when discussing the notion of enlarged perspective, stemming from Kant’s *erweiterte Denkart*.

It is well known that Kant conceived of judgments as operations of subsumption, and that the determinative judgment of the first *Critique* consisted of placing facts under rules. Now, in the third *Critique*, on the other hand, Kant presents the novelty of cases in which what one would have to do was to find a rule that would fit the singular (whether a case, a fact or an experience, could we say). As Ricœur recalls, “This judgment is ‘merely’ reflective because the transcendental subject does not determine any universally valid objectivity, but instead only takes into account the procedures the mind follows in the operation of subsumption, proceeding in a way from below to above”¹⁵³⁷, whereas in determinative judgment the operation takes place, so to speak, “from above”.

It is important to note that in this operation no universally valid objectivity is claimed, but a rule is found nonetheless, even if it is a rule applicable only in that specific case (leaving open the question of future applicability in analogous cases). If there is an exemplarity to be found here, it is the exemplarity of the particular, as Arendt claimed; now this is of course a problematic exemplarity, because no constraining obligation to follow the particular case is enforced. And this even though Ricœur many times speaks about inspiring particular gestures, and so forth.

¹⁵³⁶ Ricœur, *The Just*, pp. 94-108.

¹⁵³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 95.

In “Interpretation and/or Argumentation”, applying this notion of reflective judgment to judicial practice Ricœur further clarifies this point:

The question this poses is as follows: under what rule should a particular case be placed? Universalization, then, only provides a check on the process of mutual adjustment between the interpreted norm and the interpreted fact.¹⁵³⁸

A rule might be found, or it might be invented. The important point to stress is that experience – *this particular case before me* – is what guides reflection; and in this process there needs to be a mutual adjustment of case to rule and rule to case. This is what guides action. It is, to reiterate, a procedure that requires productive imagination and this is why interpretation is called for. Therefore, there is a triple interpretation at work here: of the fact, the rule, and of their mutual adaptation. Only thus can we reflectively validate our course of action.

Consequently, and to recap, Ricœur’s notion of practical wisdom does not do away with the deontological moment of obligation and universalization. It does not eliminate norms, quite the contrary. But it does call for the adaptation of behavior and even the invention of rules that allow inchoate universals to be attentive to thick contexts where particular cases need particular solutions. Ultimately, this is even clearer in applied ethics, where Ricœur finds almost all of his examples of choices between the bad and the worse. But the thematic attention given to it would require yet another slight reworking of his framework. Let us see how in more detailed fashion.

5.4.3 – The new framework of Ricœur’s practical philosophy

In the last chapter we have seen how Ricœur argued that the topic of “the just” and its capacities inscribed itself in the little ethics in both a vertical and a horizontal axes. *Reflections on the Just* deepens and in a way shifts the emphasis in the relation between these two domains. He reaffirms that the just is inscribed in the horizontal relation between self, “neighbors” and “others”.¹⁵³⁹ He also sees the vertical axis now passing through the good, the obligatory and the “fitting”, which

¹⁵³⁸ Ricœur, *The Just*, p. 122.

¹⁵³⁹ Ricœur, *Reflections on the Just*, p. 3.

is a useful expression he finds to express what is “adequate”, in the sense of the “tact” we mentioned above. Furthermore, at this point in time he thinks that when practical wisdom is used to solve conflicts or avoid violence, this is a sign of the preeminence of the just in practical philosophy,¹⁵⁴⁰ probably because these are taken to be “reasonable” solutions. Ricœur still continues to see the deontological moment of morality as mediating between two ethical moments. Ethics is still more encompassing than morality, and so the general structure and movement are maintained. But there is a shift in vocabulary, and also in the point of departure.

Instead of speaking of “ethical aim” or “phronesis” now Ricœur adopts a somewhat more conventional approach. He decides to speak about “fundamental ethics” and “applied ethics” or, alternatively “anterior ethics” and “posterior ethics”. What is more important, he now pays more attention to these “posterior” or “applied” types of ethics, and the specific challenges and problems they pose. He mentions medical, judicial, business and environmental ethics as being relevant domains in this area, even though he really just pays attention to the first two of these domains, not really delving into business or environmental issues.

In the article “From the Moral to the Ethical and to Ethics”¹⁵⁴¹ he lays the ground for this new set of distinctions. The existence of norms is the point of departure. But on the one hand they are rooted in life and desire (anterior ethics) and, on the other hand, their insertion in concrete situations (posterior ethics) needs to be reflected upon. One of the novelties in Ricœur’s approach is that he decides to grant a fundamental role to moral sentiments in his new framework. According to him, moral sentiments provide a connection between the anterior realm of desire, and the realm of norms. I think that for Ricœur – even though this is not fully explicit – these feelings serve to detect what is right or wrong in a pre-reflexive manner, as it were, and to point towards the norms that provide objective normative reality to the standards aimed at by those feelings. He cites shame, modesty, admiration, courage, devotion, enthusiasm and veneration... but chooses to highlight *indignation as a refusal of humiliation* and, *a contrario*, a revelation of our (and the others’) own dignity.¹⁵⁴² This is, in my opinion, not only one of the paths that led him to the study on recognition, but also one of the hints that more

¹⁵⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 8.

¹⁵⁴¹ *Ibid.*, pp. 45-57.

¹⁵⁴² *Ibid.*, pp. 48-49.

clearly connects Ricœur's social philosophy to contemporary movements – and the mentioning of the *Indignados* movement is more than obvious here.

In “Justice and Truth”¹⁵⁴³ he defines these notions as being regulative ideas, arguing that the just ultimately structures the practical field. Justice is a virtue but our views on it are often conflicted. Ricœur claims that frequently justice requires impartiality as a capacity to transcend our individual point of view, and equality, that is, the maximization of the minimal shares. But this often leads to a “mixed judgment” where capacities and obligations are somewhat confused. After all, when pursuing justice, what can and what can we not do?¹⁵⁴⁴ As such, operating a reconciliation between our capacities and these asymptotic ideals is also, in itself, a task.

In the conclusion of this article Ricœur draws the epistemological conclusions stemming from his procedure of invention of rules in practical wisdom. He speaks about this process as having both “an inventive and a logical face”¹⁵⁴⁵; the type of truth sought here is “a truth that fits”, a “certitude that in this situation this is the best decision, what has to be done”.¹⁵⁴⁶ This rapid overview allows us to grasp some of the main differences in emphasis in this new framework. But the more important part, in terms of application of the rule, is reserved for Ricœur's articles on applied ethics.

5.4.4 – Applied ethics: the case of medical and judicial judgments

In *Reflections on the Just* Ricœur dedicates two articles to applied ethics, namely “The Three Levels of Medical Judgment”¹⁵⁴⁷ and “Decision Making in Medical and Judicial Judgments”.¹⁵⁴⁸ The first of these articles is a detailed discussion of bioethics. One of its striking features is the reversal of the order of exposition, which reveals the specific nature of bioethics as an applied ethics.

Indeed, for Ricœur, the three levels are those of his little ethics, but starting from practical wisdom. The three levels are thus, the “prudential”, the “deontological” and the “reflective”. This means that in this domain the first level

¹⁵⁴³ *Ibid.*, pp. 58-71.

¹⁵⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 68.

¹⁵⁴⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 70.

¹⁵⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁴⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 198-212.

¹⁵⁴⁸ *Ibid.*, pp. 213-222.

of decision is indeed a level of application or invention of the rule, in the sense we have seen above. We are faced with concrete cases. We must decide. But in order to do so, we often use deontological codes or other norms in our search for the better solution. Finally, judgments of a reflective type (and the use of the word “reflective” here probably entails a connection with the type of reflective philosophy Ricœur usually evoked when grounding his philosophy on existence and circumscribing the domain of the self) are there to legitimate the judgments of the other levels by referring them back to their grounding in life, existence and desire (mobilizing notions such as those of happiness, health, life and so forth).

It is almost as if Ricœur wants to prove the circularity of his little ethics, in a Hegelian fashion; starting from its endpoint he is able to remake the dialectical movement and arriving at similar conclusions; so even if the path is obviously different, its results are not. Obviously, this alternative path brings new specificities to the whole project. For instance, the deontological level is now not only tied up to the operations of obligation, universalization and formalization; it now also has to deal with conflicts pertaining to clinical interventions and rules of different kinds. Also, at the last level, Ricœur now seems to admit the recourse to different encompassing ethical theories, and not only the strictly Aristotelian standpoint of *Oneself as Another*. Now, this is very important, and it seems in tune with the actual practice of ethics committees and the way in which these conflicts and decisions are truly played out. Not only strictly ethical, but also religious worldviews in the broadest sense can be summoned to play a role in these decisions – for instance, should someone receive a transfusion of blood or not – and in most of the cases actually cannot be overlooked. As such, this inverted course starting from the prudential level also allows for a radical pluralization of the reflective level (no longer called “teleological”, perhaps to free it from the strictly Aristotelian stance), which is a striking feature.

Ricœur mentions the agreement between patient and physician, the relation of caregiving as a relation based on trust, and also the need to take into account the narrative of suffering spelled out by the patient; he also emphasizes that this agreement is fragile, and that at each step (since these are delicate situations) suspicion might lurk, and trust be challenged. As a step towards the deontological moment, Ricœur mentions the existence of prudential precepts (we might call them rules of thumb) such as respecting the singularity and

indivisibility of each person, or keeping one's self-esteem and balancing it with the respect for others. In the deontological level, as always, these non-formalized rules (akin to the golden rule or the sense of justice in the little ethics) need to be formalized, and universalized (to see if they can stand that test). Furthermore, the deontological moment needs to connect the medical rules with other sorts of rules operating in society at several levels. Finally, like in the little ethics, this deontological level produces conflicts that need to be addressed.

Ricœur mentions two main sets of conflicts. Firstly, the conflict between a medical ethics oriented towards the clinic, versus a medical ethics oriented towards research. What should the main aim be? Improve caregiving or advance science? Where should we set the limits to research? What is there not be allowed? Cloning, for instance? Ricœur seems to think so. He also mentions the limits of experimentation on the human body, principally when consent is not explicitly provided. "Informed consent" is, for him, a very important rule. As often, he pleads for compromise, acknowledging that in this field matters are sometimes murky – informed consent is important, but there is also "double blind" experimentation; some seek to limit medical power and research, but its valuable use in discovering new treatments cannot be overlooked; other types of conflicts, such as patients turning against doctors and accusing them of malpractice and so on, are ever more abundant; there are cases in which concern for the individual patient might clash with concern for public health (the topic of secrecy is a case in point, for instance in cases of HIV, should or should not the physician be required to inform the sexual partner of the patient?)

His conclusion is that this is an intrinsically paradoxical field. As patients, we are torn between conflicting positions. We are not things, but our bodies are part of nature, not commodities but health maintenance costs money, suffering is private but health is public... in order to make sense of this, Ricœur invokes the several philosophical traditions and theories which can help us to shed some light on the confusion and, to some extent, orient our decisions. He mentions the Aristotelian "virtues" underlying a good medical practice, the Hippocratic oath, Augustine and the nonsubstitutability of persons, the Enlightenment and autonomy, and so forth.

Among this conflict of interpretations – because this is what it is about, in the last analysis – Ricœur calls for the recognition of a plurality of convictions in

democratic societies, but also for the need of an overlapping consensus.¹⁵⁴⁹ According to him, this will be all the more important in the conflict between the care for the individual patient and problems pertaining to public health. One of the most important of his conclusions is the acknowledgment of the constitutive fragility of medical ethics. Ultimately, like society, this can be understood as a consensual-conflictual microcosm:

But it is quite clearly on the reflective plane of moral judgment that the most intractable kinds of fragility belonging to medical ethics are revealed. What connection can we make between the request for health and the wish to live well? How can we integrate suffering and the acceptance of mortality into the idea that we have of happiness? How does a society integrate into its conception of the common good the heterogeneous strata deposited in contemporary culture by the sedimented history of solicitude? The ultimate fragility of medical ethics results from the consensual yet conflictual structure of the “sources” of common morality. The compromises I have placed under the heading of the two notions of an overlapping consensus and reasonable disagreements constitute the only replies democratic societies have when confronted by the heterogeneity of the sources of their common morality.¹⁵⁵⁰

In the above passage we find some of the long-standing polarities inhabiting Ricœur’s practical philosophy: suffering and fragility versus happiness and the desire to live well, conflict and consensus. And the need to find at least fragile and provisional solutions to this.

In the article “Decision Making in Medical and Judicial Judgments” Ricœur does not add much meaningful information or reformulate his model, but he further develops the parallelism between the two domains. In both cases, there is a back and forth movement between rules and cases. Their starting points are different – medical act stemming from suffering and the need to take care of it, and judicial judgment coming from the need to solve a conflict – but in both cases we seek a solution, the integration of the case in a more encompassing project. Also, in both cases (the conflicting parties, or doctors and patients) we need the establishment of “a just distance”. Ultimately, the parallelism is taken even further since the long-term goal of the judicial system (which is to maintain public peace,

¹⁵⁴⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 210.

¹⁵⁵⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 212.

as we have seen above) can be seen as “taking care” of society. In Ricœur’s own words:

If this is indeed the case, the question of the long-term purpose of justice arises. If the short-term purpose is to settle a conflict, is not the long-term one to reestablish the social bond, to put an end to conflict, to establish peace? If so, the medical judgment clarifies the judicial one. The whole juridical apparatus appears as one vast enterprise meant to take care of social ills, even while respecting the different roles of the physician and the judge.¹⁵⁵¹

To sum up what we have seen in these last chapters, I will say that the intrinsically conflictual character of human life, the tragic of action revealed by Ricœur’s little ethics finds an adequate field of expression in the domain of applied ethics, which he explores in the judicial domain and also, to a lesser extent, in the domain of bioethics. However, the two books on the just also bring with them not only the pluralization of conflicts but a rethinking of the procedures leading up to prudential choice, the choice which requires tact, a case by case evaluation and a look for the “action that fits” (to borrow Laurent Thévenot’s notion).

As such, it is as if the pluralization of conflicts in the practical level was almost always accompanied by a further degree of exploration of productive imagination in the search to negotiate these conflicts. This last passage I quoted indeed speaks volumes about Ricœur’s take on the judicial realm, and also reveals a striking feature of his practical philosophy: a knack for tackling social problems and ultimately hinting at the possibility of developing a practical philosophy (without however fully articulating one). Indeed the whole metaphor of “social ills” and of the juridical apparatus as possibly “curing them” is a striking metaphor often used by social philosophers. This lead will allow me to briefly mention in the next chapter Ricœur’s social philosophy.

¹⁵⁵¹ *Ibid.*, p. 222.

5.5 – Social Conflict (Social Philosophy)

Ricœur never wrote a “social philosophy”, at least not in the same manner we can say he wrote a philosophical anthropology or a hermeneutic theory. He very seldom used the term “social philosophy” and more often than not he preferred to discuss matters pertaining more to political than to social philosophy in the strictest sense. Be that as it may, there are sparse elements that we can find in his writings and which allow us to “reconstruct”, as it were, what a Ricoeurian social philosophy would be, should he have chosen to thematically tackle it.¹⁵⁵²

Because this is a reconstruction, I cannot really take a chronological approach in this chapter; as such, my method is here a little different, and the chapter is an exception in the overall methodology of these three parts which constitute the “course of conflict”. The reason why it is placed here has to do with the fact that social conflicts can be considered as being “practical conflicts” in the broadest sense of the term.

In this chapter, I will not deplete the main topics of this possible social philosophy, because many of them have already been mentioned before. In order to understand Ricœur’s social philosophy we need to bear in mind Ricœur’s elaboration of a narrative identity, and the possibility that narrative identities be applied to collective entities. We also need to remember many of the traits that make up his general practical stance, and which have already been expounded in my presentation of *Oneself as Another* and both books on the just. Among these traits, allow me to recall his description of society as a consensual-conflictual phenomenon, of conflicts as being simultaneously unavoidable and possibly creative and subject to negotiation; the emphasis on capabilities and human action, which are however always tied up to constitutive passivity and the inescapability of suffering; and ultimately the long standing goals of the desire to live well and societies as needing to strive for peace, the embeddedness of the self in

¹⁵⁵² Some commentators have highlighted some of these aspects before. See for instance Joseph Bien, “Ricœur as Social Philosopher” in *The Philosophy of Paul Ricœur*, edited by Lewis Edwin Hahn (Chicago: Open Court, 1995), pp. 287-305 and Alain Louche, “Philosophie Sociale et Reconnaissance Mutuelle chez Paul Ricœur”, in *Affectivité, imaginaire, création sociale*, edited by Raphaël Gély and Laurent Van Eynde (Bruxelles: Facultés Universitaires de Saint-Louis, 2010), pp. 125-147.

intersubjective networks without which he or she would not exist (autonomy always being only relative); his criticism of abstract and merely formal theories of justice and his emphasis on thick descriptions, thick concepts of the good and strong evaluations (like Taylor). And also, on a more personal note, his personal commitments to the (Christian, somewhat liberal) Left. This must all be taken into account when considering Ricœur's own possible version of social philosophy, but I will not in this chapter repeat what has been said before. Furthermore, this proposal of a Ricoeurian social philosophy will only be complete with what he has to say about recognition, but I will leave that for next chapter. For now, I will only mention three small topics. Firstly, the ethical and political elements underlying his social philosophy, since I have not dedicated an autonomous chapter to Ricœur's political philosophy, but it is important to mention it. And then, what in my opinion is Ricœur's strongest contribution to social philosophy, namely, the conflict between ideology and utopia. Finally, I will mention Ricœur's take on the phenomena we can call "crises", which brings him back to the present day.

5.5.1 – The ethical and political elements underlying Ricœur's social philosophy: from the political paradox to the emphasis on tolerance and hospitality

What I said above for social philosophy can be applied, to some degree, to political philosophy in the context of Ricœur's works. He also did not thematically write a "political philosophy", in the sense of Eric Weil. However, his contributions to such an effort were so many that they cannot be neglected. I will mention only a few of them. For a more systematic reconstruction of these elements, and their importance for a theory of human action, one will read the works of Johann Michel¹⁵⁵³, Bernard Dauenhauer¹⁵⁵⁴ and Pierre-Olivier Monteil.¹⁵⁵⁵

One of Ricœur's most important contributions to thinking politics and the political is, as I mentioned before, what he called the "political paradox" in *History and Truth*. This was, as often, a reflection spawned by a political event. In this case the Hungarian revolts of 1956 (their botched attempt at a revolution) that

¹⁵⁵³ See Johann Michel, *Paul Ricœur, une philosophie de l'agir humain*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁵⁴ See Bernard Dauenhauer, *Paul Ricœur, The Promise and Risk of Politics*, op. cit.

¹⁵⁵⁵ See Pierre-Olivier Monteil, *Ricœur politique* (Rennes: Presses Universitaires de Rennes, 2013).

were violently repressed by Soviet rule. As we know, for many in the West at this point in time (and Ricœur was no exception) the Soviet Union was not yet regarded as the brutal state it actually was. As such, the events in Hungary in 1956 had for Ricœur the effect of a wake-up call and it was in their wake that Ricœur defined the political paradox. According to him, power entails both a progress in rationality but also in the possibilities of its perversion. According to him: “This paradox must be retained: that the greatest evil adheres to the greatest rationality, there is political alienation *because* polity [*le politique*] is relatively autonomous.”¹⁵⁵⁶ Power is prone to evil, and this is why it must be closely watched. Political alienation is a danger that lurks every time power is exercised. This is why, Ricœur argues, we must “devise institutional techniques especially designed to render possible the exercise of power and render its abuse impossible.”¹⁵⁵⁷ In other words, the State must be controlled by its citizens and, might we add, by democratic processes of decision-making. For Ricœur, the State cannot perish, but precisely because it is necessary, it must be just. And one of the ways to control it will be by the exercise of public opinion – and in this he anticipates one of the main claims that Habermas would put forward in *The Structural Transformation of the Public Sphere*, as we have seen in part two. In *Oneself as Another* he refined these analyzes with the distinction between power-over and power in common.

These analyzes of domination and abuse of power have their dialectical counterpart in Ricœur’s insistence that democratic societies must be geared around the values of tolerance and hospitality. According to him, “Tolerance is the fruit of an asceticism in the exercise of power. It is a virtue.”¹⁵⁵⁸ This asceticism is what prevents power-over to become pervasive. When exercised properly, tolerance means the renunciation of imposing on others a specific way of life, or a value. Because it is taken to be an asceticism, Ricœur distinguishes several stages up until the following final form:

I approve of all ways of life, as long as they do not manifestly harm third parties; in short

¹⁵⁵⁶ Ricœur, “The Political Paradox” in *History and Truth*, p. 249.

¹⁵⁵⁷ *Ibid.*, pp. 261-262.

¹⁵⁵⁸ See Ricœur, “The Erosion of Tolerance and the Resistance of the Intolerable” in *Tolerance Between Intolerance and the Intolerable*, edited by Paul Ricœur, *Diogenes* 176 44/4 (1996): 189. See also Ricœur, “Tolérance, intolérance, intolérable” in *Lectures I, op. cit.*, pp. 295-312.

I leave be all types of life because they are expressions of human plurality and diversity.
*Vive la différence!*¹⁵⁵⁹

Certainly, this final stage has its perils too. Tolerance might indeed turn to indifference, as Ricœur acknowledges.¹⁵⁶⁰ Thus there are things to which we cannot be indifferent. And these are, in political terms, the *intolerable* things. These are, for him, the figures of evil, many times detected by indignation: crimes, positions that harm or make the exercise of tolerance itself impossible (disrespect, racism, xenophobia, and so forth). In a nutshell, that which causes harm.¹⁵⁶¹

Nonetheless, the “do no harm” attitude amounts to a “minimal politics”. Therefore, tolerance is perhaps a minimal base for a democratic and value pluralist society, one which allows for many forms of life, but it is in itself an insufficient condition to guarantee a sane functioning of that society. As such, and perhaps in order to be able to go beyond the mere stage of tolerance as indifference, Ricœur sometimes proposes that we adopt a stance towards the other which can be properly be called one of *hospitality*. This is, of course, a position shared by him and Levinas, one which puts the emphasis on otherness (and Levinas evidently goes beyond Ricœur in this).¹⁵⁶² One of the main forms this assumes in Ricœur is evidently what he calls “linguistic hospitality” within the scope of an ethics of translation.¹⁵⁶³ Richard Kearney has done remarkable work in analyzing the forms that otherness assumes, and also the many different aspects that hospitality can take.¹⁵⁶⁴

An ethically controlled exercise of power. This might be one of the descriptions used to sum up an important part of Ricœur’s political philosophy. And a society which implements a critical vigilance on the way power is

¹⁵⁵⁹ Ricœur, “The Erosion of Tolerance”: 191.

¹⁵⁶⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 196.

¹⁵⁶¹ *Ibid.*, p. 198.

¹⁵⁶² On the hypothesis of a relation of recognition centered on the other, besides the next chapter, see Gonçalo Marcelo, “O que seria um reconhecimento sem a exigência de reciprocidade? Levinas, Ricœur e a hipótese de um reconhecimento centrado no outro” in *Emmanuel Levinas, Entre Reconhecimento e Hospitalidade*, edited by Maria Lucília Marcos, Maria João Cantinho and Paulo Barcelos (Lisboa: Edições 70, 2011), pp. 273-288.

¹⁵⁶³ See Ricœur, *On Translation*, translated by Eileen Brennan (London: Routledge, 2006). See also Domenico Jervolino, “Rethinking Ricœur: The Unity of His Work and the Paradigm of Translation” in *Reading Ricœur*, edited by David. M. Kaplan (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2008).

¹⁵⁶⁴ See Richard Kearney, *Strangers, Gods and Monsters* (London: Routledge, 2003) and also *Hosting the Stranger: Between Religions*, edited by Richard Kearney and James Taylor (London: Continuum, 2011).

exercised, this is another feature of his social philosophy. As I have been mentioning over and over again, the specific form this assumes in Ricœur's philosophy is mainly the conflict between ideology and utopia.

5.5.2 – The conflict between ideology and utopia

In part two above we have seen many of Ricœur's assessments of ideology, and ideology critique, specifically in Marx and Habermas. In part four I also mentioned how Ricœur wants to put forward a hermeneutical critique of ideologies (thereby somehow reconciling Gadamer's and Habermas's projects) and I stated many times how the dialectical counterpart of ideology is, for Ricœur, the notion of utopia.

Allow me just to briefly develop further this relation in a few words. It is important to do so because, to reiterate, the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* are Ricœur's most important contribution to a critical theory, and they were written in the context of Ricœur's more radical – and one of the most fertile – period (around 1975).

As is obvious, the relation between ideology and utopia is also conflictual. And as usual Ricœur also thinks that they are both necessary in their constitutive functions, and that they both need to be combated in their pathological forms. If reified ideological forms must be countered by positive utopias, escapist utopias must also be avoided, because the *u-topos* leads us nowhere. Furthermore, utopias are nothing more than a blueprint, what they provide is a general indication, not a detailed plan or program. If they do, they risk becoming as reified as the ideologies they are opposed to.

Ricœur quotes Lewis Mumford and the distinction between utopias of escape and utopias of reconstruction.¹⁵⁶⁵ This means that there can be a conflict of utopias, such as a conflict of ideologies. There can also be conservative or progressive utopias. Sometimes a utopia can be a backlash, nostalgia for something past. And, as such, a utopia is not intrinsically just. It is a desire, and a projection of a given value or state of affairs, but as I will argue later, it still needs to be assessed. It goes without saying that Ricœur's favorite type of utopia is

¹⁵⁶⁵ Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, p. 270.

precisely that of reconstruction, given that for him only by creatively renewing our traditions can we somehow achieve a healthy state of society.

Part of Ricœur's claim is that an inventive type of imagination, a hermeneutic projection of a different type of reality is ultimately already an attempt at changing it. This is the reason of his criticism of Marx's famous 11th thesis on Feuerbach. For Ricœur, *interpreting* the world is already *eo ipso* changing it. This might sometimes be clearer than in other times. But when the topic is the social imaginary, he is probably right. This is akin to what Castoriadis called the instituting powers of the imaginary. Now, it remains to be known when and how these instituting or constituting powers of imagination really do succeed in altering or creating new types of institutions, and whether or not novelty is capable of really altering the social order. This is, perhaps, the difference between successful or botched attempts at revolution.

Ultimately, Ricœur does not think that utopia contains in it the power to cure all of society's malaises. A full reconciliation is evidently out of reach, also because democratic societies cannot fully eliminate conflicts, only institutionalize and try to solve them in a non-violent manner. What utopia does, on the other hand, is to confront ideology and to expose it in its contingency. Utopia can work as a sort of *epoché*. It suspends the thesis of the necessity of (this given configuration) of the real.¹⁵⁶⁶ Therefore, it is "the arm of critique"¹⁵⁶⁷ and an arm which, furthermore, can assume many forms. Ricœur mentions, for instance, the possibility of using irony to formulate utopias or, better put, to help utopias criticize and expose ideologies.¹⁵⁶⁸ With utopias, the power of fiction is put forward in order to help us reshape and redefine reality itself. It is in this sense that Ricœur speaks about "prospective identity".¹⁵⁶⁹ According to Ricœur, our identities (and, importantly, he mentions that this applies both to individual and collective identities) do not depend only on symbols of what we are or were, but also, significantly, on what we *might be*. That is, expectations for the future are, for him, fundamental in the definition of our identity. He goes on to say that in this respect our identity is "in suspense" because it is "open to surprises, to new

¹⁵⁶⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 300.

¹⁵⁶⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁶⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 303.

¹⁵⁶⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 311.

encounters”¹⁵⁷⁰ which might be decisive. And this is why we need utopias. It is also, as I will argue later, why we need *projects*.

Consequently, the “horizon of expectation” is a very important feature for a given community, a given society. We badly need utopias, especially in difficult times, when anomie might lurk. But in order to avoid that these be escapist utopias, in order for them to be able to orient action, what we need is to be able to break up encompassing ideals and utopias in a set of intermediate goals. This is what Ricœur argues in “Initiative”, when he resorts to Koselleck’s notions of space of experience and horizon of expectation. Ultimately, the bad utopia is the one who keeps further away our horizon of expectation. If utopia is understood as an asymptotic ideal, if it is to have a hold on reality it must lead to responsible, modest commitments. As he claims, expectations must be determined; and for that to happen and action to be oriented, we need a series of intermediary projects.¹⁵⁷¹

Utopia is thus the motor of Ricœur’s social philosophy, and one of its main solutions. However, any social philosophy usually wants to be able to put forward diagnoses of social situations. These diagnoses can be of healthy, or pathological situations. One of the particularly delicate situations is the one we call a “crisis”. Ricœur’s assessment of this notion will be the last trait of his social philosophy that we will see in this chapter.

5.5.3 – Ricœur on the phenomena of crises

Ricœur never downplayed the importance of action, or of political intervention. But in some situations, the real significance of politics is given even a more decisive status. And when?

If the political function, if polity [*le politique*], carries on without interruption, one can say in a sense that politics only exists in great moments, in “crises”, in the climactic and turning points in history.¹⁵⁷²

The notion of “crisis” is polysemic and it can indeed be applied to many different

¹⁵⁷⁰ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁷¹ Ricœur, “Initiative” in *From Text to Action*, p. 221.

¹⁵⁷² Ricœur, “The Political Paradox”, in *History and Truth*, p. 255.

situations. In Ricœur's writings, for instance, we can find traces of diagnosis of a crisis of the cogito¹⁵⁷³, a crisis of memory, intrinsically tied up to the abandonment of meaningful traditions, occasional detections of crises of democracy, political ideals or utopias. But when he turns to Koselleck he sees the present itself as being torn up between the space of experience and an ever-receding horizon of expectation, this being one of the conditions of our modernity.¹⁵⁷⁴ In "La crise: un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?"¹⁵⁷⁵ Ricœur undertakes a semantic analysis of the many possible meanings of this notion and asks whether or not we can consider it is a "total social fact" and one which indeed is recurrent and almost unavoidable amid modernization processes and the acceleration of time. It might just be that our time is the time of the never-ending crises. He does not fully assume it is, but he expresses concern about the crisis of values, political demobilization and anomie.

And on many other occasions, furthermore, Ricœur directly undertook analyses of his present time and the political events that marked it, including its crises.¹⁵⁷⁶ Consequently, there is, at least in some of its traits, a tendency of critical theory in Ricœur. Critical theorists, as we know, always claimed that a critique of the present time was a fundamental task. I tried before to assess the current crisis of Europe, and capitalism, through a Ricoeurian lens, and in so doing I tried to spell out what a "Ricoeurian answer" to this crisis would be.¹⁵⁷⁷ Other meaningful attempts to try to answer to this crisis have been put forward by others, most notably of which by Myriam Revault d'Allonnes.¹⁵⁷⁸ I will come back to this possibility in part eight of this thesis.

For now, the final feature of Ricœur's social philosophy I want to look at is also a phenomenon that touches upon other domains: ethics, philosophical

¹⁵⁷³ On this matter, see Constança Marcondes César, *Crise e Liberdade em Merleau-Ponty e Ricœur* (Aparecida-SP.: Idéias e Letras, 2011).

¹⁵⁷⁴ Ricœur, "Initiative", p. 219.

¹⁵⁷⁵ Ricœur, "La crise: un phénomène spécifiquement moderne?" (1987), available at the website of the Fonds Ricœur: <http://www.fondsriceur.fr/photo/crise%284%29.pdf>

¹⁵⁷⁶ See for instance Ricœur, "La crise de la démocratie et la conscience chrétienne" in *Christianisme Social* 55/4 (1947): 320-331 and Ricœur, "La crise du socialisme" in *Christianisme Social* 67/12 (1959): 695-702.

¹⁵⁷⁷ See Gonçalo Marcelo, "Is there a Ricoeurian Answer to the Crisis? (Or How to Save The Capable Human Being From Social Disintegration)" in *Archivio di Filosofia* LXXXI 1-2 (2013): 137-152.

¹⁵⁷⁸ See Myriam Revault d'Allonnes, *La crise sans fin. Essai sur l'expérience moderne du temps* (Paris: Seuil, 2012). See also the whole volume of *Archivio di Filosofia* "Attraverso la Crisi e il Conflitto. Pensare Altrimenti con Paul Ricoeur", edited by Chiara Chinello, Claudia Pedone and Alberto Romele, vol. LXXXI 1-2 (2013).

anthropology, and so on. It would also be Ricœur's last contribution to philosophy, and it will end these three stages of the "course of conflict". This is, of course, his take on recognition.

5.6 – The Struggle for Recognition (or the Recognition of a course...) ¹⁵⁷⁹

The *Course of Recognition* was Ricœur's last published book. It is in this book that his philosophical anthropology assumes its definitive form, and as such it cannot be overlooked. Furthermore, we have seen many times in this thesis how Ricœur goes back and forth in his relation with Hegel, many times criticizing him, other times using him in different manners, one time even vowing to renounce him. And yet, in this final book, here we have Hegel once again, and certainly a Hegelian topic (even though one the intentions of the book is to go, as it were, beyond Hegel on recognition). Finally, I also mentioned many times Ricœur's proximity to Honneth's own critical theory, so here we have the only book in which he explicitly analyzes, follows and then at some point distances himself from Honneth. Moreover, as I said in the last chapter, this is a decisive book for Ricœur's social philosophy. For this variety of reasons, I must conclude the three parts of the course of conflict with an analysis of *The Course of Recognition*. But this analysis has to start from the assessment of its status amid its peculiar reception.

5.6.1 – The status and reception of *The Course of Recognition*

What status should we grant to *The Course of Recognition*, the work that has put an end to the prolific production of Paul Ricœur? It is interesting to note that even if Ricœur expressed concern for his alleged “tour de France en trop”, Charles Taylor, for his part, did not hesitate to describe *The Course of Recognition* as “vintage Ricœur”. Taylor's quotation put at the cover of the English translation reads “As with Ricœur at his best, [*The Course of Recognition*] suggests a number of wholly different ways of thinking our way through the major questions of modern philosophy”.

¹⁵⁷⁹ I borrow this title from Dosse, who decided to call the last chapter of his biography, “La reconnaissance d'un parcours”. The largest part of this chapter I am presenting here is a partial reproduction of an article I published earlier in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies*. See Gonçalo Marcelo, “Paul Ricœur and the Utopia of Mutual Recognition” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 2, 1 (2011): 110-133.

I will try to understand Ricœur's book in the process of its conception and also to resituate some of the debates it has spawned. And I will start by saying that, not surprisingly, its reception has been bigger and more important in France than elsewhere, but that it has had an international scope too. This reception can be roughly divided into three main groups, each with its specific aim. There are, on the one hand, traditional Ricœur scholars who are interested in this book because it represents the culminating point of Ricœur's philosophical production, therefore transforming decisively his lasting contribution to the history of philosophy. This interest is evident since no Ricœur scholar can ignore the importance of the book, whether he or she agrees with the claims present in it or not. Not surprisingly, most of the appreciations coming from this group are positive. These readers know the whole of Ricœur's production and tend to integrate the book in the big picture. However, they are sometimes more interested in explaining its significance for Ricœur's philosophy than in critically debating Ricœur's accounts. A second and important group is made of traditional recognition scholars most of which come from a Hegelian or sometimes Marxist-Hegelian tradition. These scholars seem surprised to see Ricœur give an account of recognition whose *terminus a quo* is lexicographical rather than conceptual and that starts, both chronologically and thematically, way before Hegel, with recognition as identification, and whose *terminus ad quem* aims to go beyond Hegel in a way not always comprehensible to them. They analyze and criticize Ricœur's claims on recognition sometimes accepting some of them as very valuable, other times somewhat misreading them or not putting them in the context of Ricœurian philosophy as a whole, but most of the time trying to show that the Hegelian standpoint is still and after all the best way (maybe the only way?) to address recognition in a satisfactory matter. And there is still a third group of scholars also interested in recognition but coming from different traditions and disciplines, who become interested in this book and who try to develop autonomous investigations by using it in their models and claims.

In my opinion, this is indeed a very important book, for all the reasons I mentioned above. Also, it is a book that might change our take on recognition, and I will try to explain in what manner below. But let me start by offering a quick presentation of the book and also the way in which it deals with conflict.

5.6.2 – The framework of the *Course of Recognition* and its take on conflict

The Course of Recognition stems from a series of lectures given by Ricœur at the *Institut für Wissenschaften vom Menschen* in Vienna.¹⁵⁸⁰ As I stated before, the book results from a wager, that of conferring to the occurrences of the concept of recognition in philosophy the status of a rule-governed polysemy. Ricœur finds many such instantiations, from Homer (Odysseus being recognized when he returns home) to Honneth and Taylor, not forgetting Cartesian (recognizing the distinction between what is true and what is false) and Kantian (*Rekognition* in the third synthesis of the first *Critique*, as a connecting function) philosophies. Adopting once again a triadic organization, he decides to group these many significations in three stages of the course, namely, recognition as identification, recognizing oneself and mutual recognition. He himself admits that this is a course “from the active to the passive voice”¹⁵⁸¹, that is, from the situation of actually recognizing something, to being put in the situation of demanding recognition (thus of desiring to be recognized). His conclusion eventually makes him go beyond this opposition, insofar as in the states of peace what one does is actually to actively recognize the other, and to, so to speak, cordially invite him or her to also recognize me, in what is supposed to be a mutual engagement.

In this course Ricœur therefore traverses the domains of knowledge and perception (first stage) philosophical anthropology (second stage, where he revisits and revises the capacities asserted in *Oneself as Another*, and adds to them the capacities to remember and to promise) and ethics and social philosophy (third stage). Aside from the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* this is thus the book in which Ricœur’s thought really acquires a blatant social dimension. In the fourth chapter of the second study, “Capacities and Social Practices”¹⁵⁸² Ricœur makes a bridge between the individual forms of human capacities and their social forms. One of the consequences of this connection is that we can speak of recognition not

¹⁵⁸⁰ Other than *The Course of Recognition*, one will also read “Capacités personnelles et reconnaissance mutuelle”, in Paul Ricœur, *Écrits et Conférences* 3, pp. 445-451. This is the acceptance of speech of the Kluge Prize, awarded to Ricœur in 2004. The original text, written in English (“Asserting Personal Capacities and Pleading for Mutual Recognition” is available at <http://www.loc.gov/loc/kluge/prize/ricoeur-transcript.html>). This is an important little text, since it explicitly mentions the connection between personal capacities and the quest for recognition.

¹⁵⁸¹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 20.

¹⁵⁸² *Ibid.*, pp. 134 ff.

only of personal identities, but also of collective identities, no matter how problematic these might be from a conceptual point of view. Using for the first time in his works the notion of “capabilities”, taken from Amartya Sen, he analyzes how the recognition of capabilities is instrumental in our passing from abstract freedom to substantive freedom, to real capabilities and opportunities. He quotes Sen’s claim that we need to ensure the “rights to certain capabilities”¹⁵⁸³ and with this he asserts that “attestation has become a demand, a right to require, under the rubric of the idea of social justice.”¹⁵⁸⁴ Therefore, at least at this stage, Ricœur subscribes fully to the idea of struggle for recognition, as well as to the need to make sure that groups which are socially vulnerable are granted the recognition they deserve.

Furthermore, conflict and the negative play an essential role in *The Course of Recognition*. He asserts that in order for recognition to be demanded, received or granted, or indeed valued as an essential feature in our lives, it has to stand the traversal of the negative. He explicitly claims that it is misrecognition that gives recognition its full autonomy.¹⁵⁸⁵ Misrecognition indeed is present almost at each stage in this course, in varying degrees, from cognitive misrecognition or nonrecognition, to the existential tone of suspicion or doubt concerning our capacities, to the forms of disrespect that go along with denial of recognition at an intersubjective level. At each step, recognition is, so to speak, recognized as being essential, as being something we want for ourselves, after the experience of its being denied. Moreover, the bulk of the first four chapters of the third stage of *The Course of Recognition* are dedicated to Hegel and Honneth, as I mentioned before in parts one and two of this thesis. As such, more than half of this decisive last stage in Ricœur’s book is a deeply positive appraisal of the idea of the struggle for recognition (one of the main instantiations of conflict analyzed in this thesis) and only after this very long positive reevaluation does Ricœur pose the objection which I also mentioned before, namely, that there must ultimately be a limit to the idea of struggle, lest we not fall prey to a situation of utter victimization and bad infinity. But this ultimate objection should not make us blind to the huge and indeed almost overwhelming role that conflict, negativity

¹⁵⁸³ *Ibid.*, p. 144. On this topic, see also Vereno Brugiattelli, “Paul Ricœur e Amartya Sen su facoltà di agire e giustizia sociale” in *Archivio di Filosofia* LXXXI 1-2 (2013): 117-128.

¹⁵⁸⁴ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 148.

¹⁵⁸⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 36.

(and overcoming thereof) play in this *Course of Recognition*. Eventually, Ricœur's alternative model of recognition wagers on the possibility of understanding recognition as a gift, something to be granted, more than demanded. And in order to ground this possibility, he strives to define the states of peace as "clearings" of recognition. That is, even though *struggle* will continue being the *main form of recognition*, that is, the main motor through which recognition patterns are formed and reconfigured (Ricœur never denies this) he still humbly proposes that we think about a different possibility, a different, let us say, ideal, eventually capable of inspiring another set of practices. Let us see exactly how.

5.6.3 – Ricœur on gift-giving, mutuality and the states of peace

By all accounts, the single most decisive book having influenced Ricœur in the *Course of Recognition*, besides Honneth's *Struggle for Recognition*, has certainly been Hénaff's masterpiece, *Le prix de la vérité*. What depiction of the *gift* do we find in Hénaff's account, and what is its connection with recognition? In a very schematic way, I will sum it up¹⁵⁸⁶ by mentioning the following features: according to Hénaff, gift-giving is to be *reciprocal*. He does not want to give an account of the moral, disinterested act of giving without expecting anything in return. Rather, he is interested in giving an account of *ceremonial gift-giving* as an act of reciprocal recognition, which is, according to him, at the core of the social bond. His breakthrough is the following: by giving something, the giver is investing himself in that which he gives. This is, according to him, what makes the specificity of human communities, contrary to the acts of gift-giving that we can find in the experiences of interaction of the communities of the big apes, whose ethology he investigates. According to him, the gift is neither purely free nor purely constrained. On the one hand, not being the moral disinterested gift, the giver can legitimately expect something in return, but only insofar as this is the *sine qua non* of the existence of the social bond. Of course, the one who receives

¹⁵⁸⁶ Besides Marcel Hénaff, *Le Prix de la Vérité: Le don, l'argent, la philosophie* (Paris: Seuil, 2002) one will read on this topic the many precisions given by Hénaff in a long list of e-mail exchanges with Alain Caillé and Jacques T. Godbout in *De la reconnaissance. Don, identité et estime de soi* in *Revue du MAUSS* n.º 23 (2004): 242 – 288. See also Alain Loute, "The Gift and Mutual Recognition: Paul Ricœur as a Reader of Marcel Hénaff", in *Paul Ricœur and the Task of Political Philosophy*, edited by Greg Johnson and Dan Stiver (Lanham: Lexington, 2013), pp. 105-123.

the gift may not want to give anything back (he is free to act accordingly) but this will amount to a disintegration of the bond. The giver, in the act of giving, is *defying* the other to respond. He is recognizing the other in the gift he offers. Therefore, the gift is *symbolic*. Hence, it is because the gift is, up to a certain extent, free, that it enjoins the other to respond. This is not, primarily, a matter of the goods exchanged. And let us recall that it is not the same object that is given in return. It is a matter of the relationship of mutual recognition that is established. By recognizing the other, I am enjoining him or her to recognize me back.

Ricœur definitely follows Hénaff in his account of mutual recognition. In depicting the “states of peace” and the “clearings of recognition” as an alternative to the paradigm of the struggle for recognition, Ricœur is most certainly following a suggestion given by Hénaff himself in a footnote of *Le prix de la vérité* in which he notes, in passing, that what is lacking in Honneth’s approach is an “ethology of the encounter” [*éthologie de la rencontre*] in the context of an anthropology of the gift.¹⁵⁸⁷ For Hénaff, this relationship of recognition [*rapport de reconnaissance*] is precisely opposed to Hegelian struggle for recognition. Nonetheless, Ricœur does not follow Hénaff in all his claims. Hénaff is very prudent in his use of the expression “economy of the gift”, which Ricœur uses several times. For Hénaff, to want to replace capitalist market-driven exchanges for something such as an “economy of the gift” would make absolutely no sense. This is not what Ricœur wants either, but he expressly connects his critique of the omnipresence of market logic to his notion of an economy of the gift. And Hénaff also disconnects in a decisive manner the moral gift from the ceremonial gift. According to him, the purely detached gift, of which he finds the perfect example in Seneca’s *De Beneficiis*, loses all the dimension of the defiance, of the injunction to reciprocity that founds the social bond. Therefore, he is not primarily interested in the moral gift.

Ricœur, on the contrary, challenges this radical uncoupling. His reading, it seems to me, is halfway between the moral gift and the ceremonial gift. Ricœur

¹⁵⁸⁷ “Quant au *potlatch*, même le plus agonistique, c’est une lutte de dons, c’est-à-dire un duel à travers des biens qui ‘symbolisent’ les protagonistes, ce n’est pas un combat par les armes. Le modèle hégélien suppose en somme que l’esprit du don cérémoniel a disparu. Ce modèle définit la relation conflictuelle des individus modernes. Quand la médiation de la chose donnée n’est plus là, la dialectique produit le Trois à partir du Deux. C’est une éthologie de la rencontre dans le cadre d’une anthropologie du don qui fait défaut dans certaines approches, ainsi A. Honneth, *La Lutte pour la reconnaissance*, Paris, Éd. du Cerf., 2000.” Hénaff, *Le Prix de la vérité*, p. 183.

pays special attention to the second part of *Le prix de la vérité*, the one dealing precisely with the gift. In a small text called “Considération sur la triade: ‘le sacrifice, la dette, la grâce’ selon Marcel Hénaff”¹⁵⁸⁸, Ricœur formulates the following hypothesis: can we not consider that the moralization of the experiences of gift-giving is the process whereby they cease to be mere historical examples and attain the status of something fundamental?¹⁵⁸⁹ In fact, Ricœur interprets Hénaff’s account of the “challenge” to give in return as containing, *in nuce*, a moral metaphorical power capable of universalizing this ceremonial device, even if in our societies, ceremonial recognition has largely disappeared. Allow me to sum up this discussion. Hénaff is claiming: ceremonial recognition is less important in our societies than it was in ancient societies; anthropologists and philosophers have not been able to grasp this ceremonial nature of gift-giving as mutual recognition founding the social bond because they have largely misread it as an unconditional moral gift, therefore missing its symbolic character. And Ricœur is responding: but it is precisely the interpretation of the gift as free gift-giving, that is, *every gift being as if it were a first gift* – that is, a *moral gift* – that grants the symbolic, ceremonial gift-giving the nature of a transcultural symbol. Therefore, it seems that in this Ricœurian interpretation we are dealing with a second degree symbol: recognition is symbolic exchange and even if ceremonial gift-giving has lost its importance in our societies, this does not mean that this festive experience of recognition, which still exists somehow, in practices different from those of archaic societies (“the simple gesture of extending our hand to someone”, he says on “La reconnaissance, entre don et réciprocité”¹⁵⁹⁰) has lost its power. In fact, it can still be considered as a metaphor, a symbol of a transcultural experience of *real* recognition that we can normatively project as an ideal that could and should always be accomplished. This is his utopia of recognition. And it is to the effectuation of this utopia, that exists but still in a very exceptional manner, in the form of “clearings”, that Ricœur calls the states of peace, under the banner of agape.

¹⁵⁸⁸ See Ricœur “Considération sur la triade: ‘le sacrifice, la dette, la grâce’ selon Marcel Hénaff” in *Le Don et la Dette*, org. M.M Olivetti, (Padova: CEDAM, 2004), pp. 37-44.

¹⁵⁸⁹ “on peut se demander si la moralisation n’est pas la voie sur laquelle l’une ou l’autre de ces expériences-témoin s’arrachent aux limitations culturelles qui en constituent l’historicité et ainsi s’élèvent de l’historique au fondamental.” *Ibid.*, p. 37.

¹⁵⁹⁰ See Paul Ricœur, “La reconnaissance, entre don et réciprocité. Propos recueillis par R. Hebbing”, in *Réforme* 3063 (2004), p. 8.

The remaining part of this section will deal with Ricœur's very specific notion of mutuality, and the way it distinguishes itself from reciprocity. First of all, let me turn to the states of peace. What is, according to Luc Boltanski, a state of peace? Boltanski, in *L'amour et la justice comme compétences*¹⁵⁹¹ adopts a standpoint that is not very different from the Ricoeurian approach of the interaction between love and justice. According to Boltanski, justice is incapable of stopping, by its own means, violence. And peace excludes any violent means used to settle a dispute, that is, every confrontation that can ultimately lead to the destruction of one of the parties engaged in the conflict.¹⁵⁹² According to the traditional distinction of love into *philia*, *eros* and *agape*, so we can have different engagements according to these three forms. However, the one that interests here the most is *agape*. Boltanski characterizes the general attitude of those in these states of peace as the "silence of equivalence".¹⁵⁹³ That is: justice is always measuring and comparing, looking for reciprocity. In a state of *agape*, by contrast, there is a certain *insouciance* characterizing the social bond.¹⁵⁹⁴ *Agape* does not remember neither the offenses made against it, nor the deeds accomplished. Its complete indifference to any sort of scheming is one of its main features. Boltanski refuses to consider *agape* as a utopia, and it is easy to understand why: if it is to have any sociological relevance, the state of *agape* must exist, if only in a partial and imperfect way, in practice.¹⁵⁹⁵ Therefore he rejects the approaches that would make of *agape* a goal worthy of respect but impossible to defend up until its last consequences¹⁵⁹⁶ – Boltanski is not happy with the interpretations of *agape* that make of it a mere regulative model of people's conducts.¹⁵⁹⁷ He follows Ricœur's accounts of the phenomena of metaphor and parable (mainly in *The Rule of Metaphor*), therefore implicitly recognizing the poetic content of the depictions of love, but insists upon the pragmatic character of the situations described in the parables.¹⁵⁹⁸ One of the most interesting features of Boltanski's depiction though, is that *agape* is disconnected both from desire and from the merit of those who are

¹⁵⁹¹ See Luc Boltanski *L'amour et la justice comme compétences. Trois essais de sociologie de l'action* (Paris: Éditions Métailié, 1990).

¹⁵⁹² *Ibid.*, p. 120.

¹⁵⁹³ *Ibid.*, p. 121.

¹⁵⁹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 177.

¹⁵⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 154.

¹⁵⁹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 200.

¹⁵⁹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁵⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 197.

its object, as we can see in the example of the Fioretti¹⁵⁹⁹: those who are in a state of agape spread love to all the people they encounter, whoever they are. They give without expecting anything in return. And they do not even anticipate the future (they have no expectation, so they have no desire), they simply concentrate on the needs of those they meet, trying to provide for them.

Certainly, not everybody is in these states. People can inhabit other cities, or orders of standing, as those we have seen in part two of this thesis. Thus the possibility of misunderstanding exists: when the man of love interacts with the man of justice they interpret each other's actions differently. This is a way in which the desire can reenter in this sphere of exacerbated love: if, by some reason, there is a disruption in this relation – let us say that the receiver rejects the gift of the man of peace¹⁶⁰⁰ – then he can, faced with this difficulty, *desire* that the other accepts the gift. But in doing this he will already be exiting the logic of pure love, according to Boltanski. Pure love is immediate, absolutely concentrated in the present and ignorant even of any abstract idea. Those in this state focus themselves on the concrete others that they encounter. This is a purely horizontal relationship of gift-giving, with no vertical dimension. Love makes no distinction between these concrete others in that everyone, the criminal as the most virtuous man, are all deserving of being its object. In sum, for Boltanski, in the states of agape: 1) everyone is the protector of those that he encounters; 2) love is free from anxiety because the one who gives expects nothing in return; 3) even the receiver of the gift does not expect anything because he himself is in this state, free from anxiety (and therefore, if he receives, he can only be *grateful*); 4) this state naturally tends to equality (even though without calculation): those who have more tend to give more, because they have it; 5) This feature is so extreme that no one accumulates goods in a selfish manner. People do not worry about their future; 6) Even production has as its only goal the satisfaction of the immediate basic vital needs, nothing more; 7) the insistence upon the present is so great, that the past (and possible past debts) are not taken into account. Boltanski's conclusion: for this regime to hold, it is necessary that everybody remains disinterested. Consequently, no economy is possible in that world.

¹⁵⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 185 ff.

¹⁶⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

Ultimately, what can we say about this depiction? First of all, that even though it is anchored in real, empirical experiences (love always resurfaces, albeit partially, in one way or another, in society), Boltanski's reconstruction of the perfectly coordinated state of peace is perfectly utopian, and he himself acknowledges it. Hence, even if love is not everywhere every time, its practices still exist, and they form a sphere of meaning. This dual structure: the states of peace have an empirical ground that we can find in everyday practices *and* still they have a normative surplus of meaning that is able to project their purest achievement as a kind of utopia or regulative ideal that tends to attract us and regulate praxis is, I contend, what we will find in the Ricoeurian approach of recognition in the states of peace.

Ricoeur does not retain all these elements of Boltanski's model of agape, nor does he contend that in the clearings of recognition people behave like Boltanski said they would in his reconstruction of a utopia of agape. In his depiction of a state of agape, Ricoeur considers that the dialectic of love and justice will be mediated by the symbolic gift-exchange. Reconstructing the long debate that has taken place around this notion by anthropologists such as Mauss, Lévi-Strauss and Hénaff¹⁶⁰¹ Ricoeur ultimately arrives at his distinction between reciprocity and mutuality. His point of departure is Walzer's: we live in a society where we have achieved, more or less, an equal attribution of rights, but not an equal attribution of goods.¹⁶⁰² And we tend to resist, up to a certain extent, the encroachment of the commercial sphere.¹⁶⁰³ Some goods are nonvenal. Ultimately, Ricoeur notes that history shows us the recurring defeat of that which is without price (every teacher demands a payment) and he prefers to speak of "noncommercial goods" such as moral dignity or the integrity of the human body.¹⁶⁰⁴ Recognition will be taken to be a good of that nature: a noncommercial good. Therefore, his utopia of mutual recognition, as I see it, will also be a utopia of the redistribution of recognition.

¹⁶⁰¹ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 225 ff.

¹⁶⁰² This is, for Ricoeur, one of society's main problems: "il y a un lien étrange entre la production de richesse et la production d'inégalités – mais nous vivons de cela, n'est-ce pas, cruellement." See "La lutte pour la reconnaissance et l'économie du don" in *Hermenéutica y Responsabilidad. Homenaje a Paul Ricoeur*, org. Marcelino Agis Villaverde (Santiago de Compostela: Campus Universitario, 2005), p. 23.

¹⁶⁰³ Ricoeur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 233.

¹⁶⁰⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

The most curious distinction that Ricœur establishes is between reciprocity and mutuality or, as he calls it, “good reciprocity” and “bad reciprocity”.¹⁶⁰⁵ What is reciprocity? Ricœur places it in a semantic field close to the notions of justice, equivalence and the market. He states that “the marketplace, we could say, is reciprocity without mutuality”.¹⁶⁰⁶ Its main feature is the emphasis on the impersonal, systematic relation. As such, reciprocity is blind. I think this appreciation might be close to the Ricœurian account of Kantian moral law: it is charged of being blind too. As I mentioned before, Ricœur puts the value of the person above the respect for the law. In talking about mutuality, he is also emphasizing the importance of the persons engaging in concrete interaction, over and above the systematic nature of the relation binding them. Mutuality focuses on the persons, reciprocity on the relation.

And this is the point where the notion of dissymmetry becomes fundamental. Ricœur sees a threat in taking reciprocal recognition too far. He is probably accusing all Hegelian forms of recognition of falling into this trap. The one is not the other. As he claims “Forgetting this asymmetry, thanks to the success of analyzes of mutual recognition, would constitute the ultimate misrecognition at the very heart of actual experiences of recognition.”¹⁶⁰⁷ Here, it is worthwhile to mention an article of Laurent Thévenot, in which he himself links his project with Ricœurian and Honnethian recognition.¹⁶⁰⁸ Not entering into the detail of this articulation, I will still mention that Thévenot goes even further than Ricœur. In speaking about the constitutive asymmetry of recognition, he speaks of the “double dissymmetry” of love¹⁶⁰⁹; the loved one depends on the lover, insofar as the lover recognizes in the loved person a value that was foreign to the loved person. In this, the lover seems to know, and to recognize the other even better than the other knows and recognizes him or herself. In the experiences of true love, we might add, sexual or otherwise, even if one experiences the communion of some sort of fusion – and in this there is some sort of horizontal recognition – the truth is that there is also a sense of verticality, in that each person values the

¹⁶⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 241.

¹⁶⁰⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 231.

¹⁶⁰⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 261.

¹⁶⁰⁸ See Laurent Thévenot, “Reconnaissances: avec Paul Ricœur et Axel Honneth” in *La quête de reconnaissance: nouveau phénomène social total*, edited by Alain Caillé (Paris: La découverte, 2007), pp. 269-283.

¹⁶⁰⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 280.

other above him or herself. Thus true love is like a naturalization of Augustine's confession: *Tu autem eras interior intimo meo, superior summo meo*.

Ricœur does not go as far as Thévenot in this matter. But he emphasizes that each person is irreplaceable. We exchange gifts, but not places.¹⁶¹⁰ This is why there is no *obligation* to give a gift in return. Reciprocity would *force* a return: *do ut des*. In mutuality, by contrast, respect and distance is introduced into intimacy.¹⁶¹¹ Therefore, I feel motivated to *give*, that is, to *recognize* the other by means of my symbolic gift in which I am myself engaged (in this Ricœur follows Hénaff), and this is a *voluntary act*: "Undertaking to give a gift is the gesture that initiates the whole process".¹⁶¹² The other, upon receiving this gift, is therefore not forced but *called to* respond (here is the similarity with Fichte's *Aufforderung* that Robert Williams rightfully detected). Let us recall that this is disinterested gift-giving: we are in a state of *agape*. In this sense, like Boltanski noted, there is no remembrance of the past. A gift that would demand a return would not be a gift: it would be market economy. On the contrary, a successful gift, in this sense, forgets about itself in the act of giving itself. So the gift in return is a "second first gift." I would add that it is not necessary that the gift *really* forgets itself: it might be enough that we simply do not attach to it so much importance that we put the other in the place of someone who has a debt towards ourselves. If someone has a debt, it is the self rather than the other. Ricœur notes that in order for this mutuality to be possible we should emphasize the right way to receive, and this is by becoming *grateful* (*reconnaissant*). It is gratefulness that, as some sort of a moral sentiment towards the person that engaged him or herself in the gift given to us, does not force us, but rather enjoins us to respond, and to recognize the other that has already recognized us: "A *good receiving* depends on gratitude, which is the soul of the division between good and bad reciprocity".¹⁶¹³ Ricœur calls these mutual exchanges "festive".¹⁶¹⁴

By introducing this notion of the festive, Ricœur is recalling the small gestures of recognition present in our everyday lives. These are the proof that the

¹⁶¹⁰ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 263.

¹⁶¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹⁶¹² *Ibid.*, p. 242.

¹⁶¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁶¹⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 244.

struggle for recognition really strives for something that exists.¹⁶¹⁵ They are the empirical rooting of this approach, which can be qualified as being ideal-typical, in the Weberian sense, in that it simultaneously looks for conceptual precision and empirical exemplification.¹⁶¹⁶

5.6.4 – A utopia of recognition

The time has come to define the status of Ricœurian recognition. As we have seen, his interpretation of mutual gift-giving as a process of symbolic recognition is halfway between the ceremonial and the moral. What is Ricœur doing, when he denounces the “unhappy consciousness” or the “bad-infinity” of an all-demanding subject? In a way, he is saying: before demanding recognition, we should happily grant it. Want recognition? So recognize. Recognize, before demanding recognition for yourself. By introducing dissymmetry at the heart of reciprocity, Ricœur is not only affirming the gap between people. He is also saying: put the other before yourself. And if the “small miracle of recognition” shall be granted to you, act gracefully: be grateful. And, if possible, recognize in return (not that you are obliged to do it, but if you do not do it, as Hénaff shows us, you will be breaking the social bond). Consequently, in a certain sense, Ricœur is proposing an asymmetrical, *altruistic* relation of recognition whereby the other assumes a certain verticality: I must recognize the other first.

This verticality does not make him or her inaccessible. The ceremonial character of recognition presupposes the possibility of horizontal experiences of interaction. However, amidst this ceremonial character, Ricœur is constructing a pure ethics of recognition. Therefore, recognition also expands the little ethics of *Oneself as Another*. In a way, in the *Course of Recognition*, solicitude is placed above *ipseity*. This reminds us of the hyperbolic ethic of Emmanuel Levinas. In a certain manner, I think that what is at stake is the definition of a new figure in Ricœur’s anthropology: that of the altruistic subject. Human being is therefore capable of recognizing. And this recognition might become inspirational. This is of course presupposing that recognition can assume a volitional character: instead of striving for the recognition of my identity, responding to a constitutive need,

¹⁶¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

¹⁶¹⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

what I should be doing is simply recognizing those who come across me. Honneth understood well this aspect of Ricœurian recognition¹⁶¹⁷: what Ricœur has in mind is a volitional, unilateral act of recognition, even though this act calls for a response. For Honneth, this is never possible without a previous relationship of reciprocal recognition. In sum, this discussion is over the point of departure. For Honneth, reciprocal recognition always precedes, from a constitutive viewpoint, individual identity. Thus, any volitional act of recognition has a process of reciprocal recognition as a *sine qua non*. For Ricœur *ipseities* are also intersubjectively grounded, but the individual identity of the person is not lost within intersubjectivity, nor are its capacities to act in an intentional manner. This makes the moral, intentional act of giving and recognizing his initial standpoint.

It seems obvious that this discourse on recognition is an alternative discourse. What is original in Ricœur's approach to recognition is not only the effort to find the philosophical relevance of the "rule-governed polysemy" of recognition. Rather, when he is criticizing the all-demanding subject and assimilating the model of the struggle for recognition to a market-based approach (like the capitalist, the all-demanding subject wants it all) what he is doing is denouncing an ideology possibly present in the model of the struggle for recognition. And over and against this ideological stranglehold on the discourse about recognition, he is proposing his own utopia, an ethical utopia of recognition, driven by hope.

How can this attack on the model of the struggle for recognition be of help? On the one hand, it helps us to get rid of reified forms of identity. Honneth has expressed concern with these degenerate forms too, by denouncing the attitude of a purely "detectivist"¹⁶¹⁸ approach towards one's identity. By insisting that identity is not sameness but *ipseity*, and that it has a narrative, changing character, and also that what we should strive for is the recognition of *capacities*, not reified identities, Ricœur certainly is providing a good service to recognition theory. His insistence that the capacities are individual and that individual *ipseities* have a certain precedence over collective identities points in the same direction. As K. A. Appiah noted, an identity provides us with a script. This script is important in the

¹⁶¹⁷ See Michaël Foessel, "La philosophie de la reconnaissance: une critique sociale, Entretien avec Axel Honneth", in *Esprit* 346 (7/2008): 94.

¹⁶¹⁸ See Honneth, *Reification*, p. 67.

orientation of our lives. But we want our lives “not too tightly scripted”.¹⁶¹⁹ Thus the importance of the emphasis put in the changing character of identities.

As Ricœur has shown in his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*¹⁶²⁰ both ideology and utopia make up our social imaginary. Ideology has a reproductive function, whereas utopia is productive imagination at work. The status of this critique to the dominant discourse on recognition has therefore the status of a utopia. And this not only because it is giving new meaning to the concept of recognition: also because it is projecting a possible alternative social order. Ricœur takes the effective experiences of recognition as his point of departure. However, his goal is to *enlarge* the spheres of mutual recognition. These are horizontal, mutual experiences of gift-giving and symbolic gestures. Individual symbolic gestures, might I add. In *History and Truth* Ricœur spoke about the gestures of exceptional individuals, like Willy Brandt or Martin Luther King, who can inspire other people. This symbolism of the gestures of recognition is very important to Ricœur. Honneth does not ignore it either: it is, for instance, a gesture of recognition, mere sympathy, that can prevent the horrible experience of social invisibility.

But for Ricœur these gestures are the symbolic basis of the act of recognition. He seems to expect that the gestures of exceptional individuals spread to the whole of social reality:

Such gestures, cannot become an institution, yet by bringing to light the limits of the justice of equivalence, and opening space for hope at the horizon of politics and of law on the postnational and international level, they unleash an irradiating and irrigating wave that, secretly and indirectly, contributes to the advance of history toward states of peace.¹⁶²¹

It is not easy to see how that reality can come about. These gestures, which Alain Loute analyzed and questioned, associating them with the notion of

¹⁶¹⁹ See Appiah’s comment of Taylor’s Multiculturalism. K. Anthony Appiah, “Identity, Authenticity, Survival: Multicultural Societies and Social Reproduction” in Charles Taylor, *Multiculturalism: Examining the Politics of Recognition*, *op. cit.*, pp. 149-163.

¹⁶²⁰ See *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, ed. George H. Taylor (New York: Columbia University Press, 1986).

¹⁶²¹ Ricœur, *The Course of Recognition*, p. 245.

courage¹⁶²², are difficult to understand. On the one hand, even if exceptional individuals can have an inspiring, exemplary role, it is up to “normal” individuals to take up the task of enlarging the spheres of mutual recognition. On the other hand, as Loute rightfully notes, it is not even sure that the symbolic dimension of this gesture is going to be well understood.¹⁶²³ Moreover, even if it is understood, it will still be necessary that we actively decide to emulate it.¹⁶²⁴ It is not enough to contemplate the beauty of the gesture and let ourselves get carried away, dreaming about it. Utopias are sometimes beautiful. But we still need them to mobilize us. Loute recalls us that what we need is a collective appropriation of that possible. The problem is that these gestures, and the procedures of mutual recognition as such, seem only to be able to touch those who are the closest to us, or that come across us. This contagion is individual. Moreover: it cannot be forced. Does this mean that it is inchoate? Before answering, I will compare it with Honneth’s project.

In my view, both Ricœur and Honneth’s projects of recognition have an inbuilt normative character. This normative character does not mean a set of rules coming from nowhere and opposed to reality. Rather, they reflect a set of already-existing social practices and senses of justice that are present in our ethical lives. But inasmuch as both Ricœur and Honneth envisage social change, inasmuch as their social philosophies condemn injustice and conceptually analyze the need for recognition, they have *in nuce* the normative expectation of an expansion of those already-institutionalized practices. Theirs is a project of improvement and expansion of those practices. Of course they envisage them very differently. Ricœur seems not to have understood that in Honneth this surplus of meaning of recognition also prevents it from being fully institutionalized. Honneth, on the other hand, is not denying the existence and pertinence of volitional, one-sided recognition, he is just saying that this is not the fundamental act of recognition.

¹⁶²² See Alain Loute, “La logique excessive du geste courageux: une force de création sociale? Réflexions à partir de Paul Ricœur” in *Dissensus. Revue de philosophie politique de l’ULG*, n.° 2, (9/2009): 166-177.

¹⁶²³ “Outre la question de la production du geste excessif, se pose la question de sa réception sociale. Pour qu’il initie un mouvement de transformation sociale, il faut qu’il soit entendu et reçu par les membres de la société. Il faut, tout d’abord, que ces derniers comprennent le sens que le geste excessif leur donne à penser. Or, le geste excessif, dans sa dimension symbolique, ne rend-il pas possible, comme du reste tout discours poétique, une pluralité de lectures possibles? N’est-il pas possible d’interpréter le geste excessif comme le geste d’un naïf, d’un idiot ou comme une forme subtile de raisonnement stratégique?” *Ibid.*, p. 174.

¹⁶²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 175.

Ultimately, I would say that they have much more in common than is usually acknowledged. Both envisage the possibility of a society whose members are duly recognized.

In 1992, when he wrote *The Struggle for Recognition*, Honneth probably would have left the task of bringing about a society whose members are duly recognized for the action of social movements. Today, he is perhaps paying more attention to the institutionalization of the practices of recognition and to our democratic ethical life. He is, however, very prudent in what comes down to the distinction between the role of the citizen and that of the theoretician, whereas I tend to agree with those interpreters, like Emmanuel Renault and Jean-Philippe Deranty, who tend to try to more directly politicize his theory of recognition. Ultimately, even if we conceptually define the “decent society” as Margalit does¹⁶²⁵, or the “recognized society”, the empirical situation tends to be far more complicated. This society might not be more than a regulative ideal. A utopia. But it is a utopia that we must strive to accomplish. Ultimately, both Honneth and Ricœur seem to be saying to us, albeit in different ways: when it comes down to recognition, we cannot only talk the talk. We also have to walk the walk. If we want recognition, then we should struggle for it (Honneth) or grant it (Ricœur). These might be the two sides of the same phenomena. Probably we must strike a balance between the two approaches and do both. Struggling for recognition at the political level. Recognizing others at an ethical level.

Ricœur is prudent enough not to state that this horizon of reconciliation shall be definitive. He only speaks about the “clearings” of recognition. It is in these that he finds the festive character of recognition. The clearings are provisional states of conciliation, amidst the conflict. This means that we have to think about what David Pellauer calls “peaceful conflict”¹⁶²⁶, that is, forms of conflict that do not involve violence. Maybe these might be arbitrated by the procedure of compromise, such as it appears in the works of Boltanski and Thévenot. Other authors, such as Nathalie Frogneux, argue that in the context of interpersonal relationships, conflict is precisely what allows us to keep violence

¹⁶²⁵ See Avishai Margalit, *The Decent Society*, translated by Naomi Goldblum (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996).

¹⁶²⁶ See David Pellauer “Que les hommes capables se reconnaissent!” in *Rue Descartes* Hors-série “L’homme capable: autour de Paul Ricœur” (2006), p. 164. I thank David Pellauer for his useful remarks on this topic, which is of the utmost importance.

away.¹⁶²⁷

Ultimately, I think Ricœur's proposal is edifying. His utopia is anchored in the hope that step by step, individuals will start acting more ethically. As such, this utopia has the character of a hymn. I will end this article with a perplexity. Might it be that a very modest effectuation of this ethical proposal be tied with the destiny of the reception of this book? We can never anticipate what the reception of a book will be, or the success of its author. Many a genius only had posthumous success. Fernando Pessoa, the greatest of Portuguese poets, published scarcely during his lifetime, and was widely acclaimed posthumously. What is more, as Kierkegaard duly noted, ethics is not a matter of a communication of knowledge, but instead of communication of power: I can be the greatest specialist in ethics in the world, and still be morally dubious. In this sense, if ethical behavior cannot be imposed, only proposed, maybe the inspiring gesture and the edifying proposal can have more success than any command. It remains to be known whether or not a book is ever capable of making someone act better. Many a reader has probably read the whole of Kantian practical philosophy without ever respecting a categorical imperative. As such, the fate of *The Course of Recognition*, and of Ricœur's ethical theory in general remains unknown. However, by analyzing the experiences of recognition and by redefining the conditions of possibility of something such as recognition, Ricœur is certainly contributing to reshape our own understanding of it. As such, the world of this work is colliding with our worlds, the worlds of its readers. He is refiguring it. Will this help? Let us hope so.

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With this incursion in *The Course of Recognition* our own "course of conflict" in the works of Paul Ricœur finds its completion. I have analyzed the majority of Ricœur's books and many of his articles, some of them well known, others not as much. I think I have been successful in proving the centrality of the notion of conflict in the thought of Ricœur with these last three parts, in the same way I had done for the history of philosophy in part one, and in the contemporary

¹⁶²⁷ See Nathalie Frogneux "Lorsque cesse le conflit surgit la violence" in *Violences et agressivités au sein du couple. Vol. I, Mieux comprendre par le croisement des disciplines*, edited by Nathalie Frogneux and Patrick de Neuter (Louvain-la-Neuve: Bruylant-Academia, 2009), pp. 35-50.

philosophical and sociological landscape in part two. All together, these five parts constitute what is already a long thesis. In them, I have been as exhaustive as my capacities allowed for, also given the limitations of time and space involved in writing a doctoral thesis.

In the remainder of this thesis, which will be shorter and more incisive than the preceding parts, all that there is left to do is, firstly, to sum up and try to provide some order to what has been said before about the significance of conflict for Ricœur in its many uses (part six), to spell out some of the reservations that I ultimately have concerning his philosophy (part seven) and, ultimately, to try to articulate in a condensed manner a project of hermeneutic social philosophy and a new critique of reason (part eight). These will largely be independent claims I will be putting forward, even though they will be building on what has been expounded before.

Part Six

An Attempt at Systematization: Way Beyond Conflict

After the very long mediation of the last five parts of this thesis, I will allow myself to draw some provisional conclusions. To my knowledge, no one has ever written a history of conflict in philosophy. These last five parts are my modest contribution to such a history, should anyone ever decide to write it. Some philosophers tried – and more or less succeeded – in providing systematic accounts of conflict in human history and reality. Hegel and Marx are a case in point, whether or not we believe that they grasped something essential, or instead charge them of delivering nothing more than fancy fantasies. In these following pages, I will recall some of the figures of conflict we have seen before. I will start from the accounts seen in parts one and two, and then proceed by summing up the instantiations of conflict in Ricœur. And the first thing that needs to be said is that this is only a possible reading. A reading that finds confirmation in what Ricœur himself states, but that has no systematic ground (in the strong sense of the word) to draw from. As such, it is an attempt at systematization without a system, a reconstruction that proposes a possible ordering of fragments and dispersed uses.

In fact, Ricœur has no general, all-encompassing theory of conflict. In a way, even though we can say that conflict is indeed an overarching concept for him, he stops short of developing a fully systematic theory of conflict. The reasons for that are fully stated above; if he decided to posit conflict as the key to all philosophy and to the very development and apprehension of reality, he would fall back into full-blown Hegelianism; were he to adopt the same procedure only in social terms, he would fall back into full-blown orthodox Marxism, even if he tried to update some of its categories. Either way, he would probably adopt an ambitious, all-explaining stance that certainly was alien to his own philosophical standpoint, his affirmation of finite existence and of the finite act of interpretation and all its corollaries.

He also criticizes Hegel for adopting and using the term “negative” or “negativity” in so loose a way that he risks dissolving it, at the weight of its own semantic shifts. The negative can be anything and everything. Up to a certain

extent, Ricœur's use of the term "conflict", and our own depiction of it runs the same risk, because so many different phenomena can be understood, according to him, as being conflictual without, however, these conflicts having the same inner workings and results. And yet, the negative, and conflict, do play, as we have seen, a fundamental role in Ricœur's philosophy. This is proved by his unflinching interest in the several philosophies of negation, as we can see in Alison Scott-Bauman's work and also, clearly, in the many occurrences of conflict that were the object of the last three parts of this dissertation.

Since Ricœur did not have a single universal hermeneutic key to organize and rank all these different occurrences of conflict such as he saw them, the most we can say is that he depicted conflicts as they were presented to him, on a case-by-case basis, one by one. But this does not prevent us from finding a certain "rule-governed polysemy" in it, as Ricœur himself claimed to have found in the uses of recognition in philosophy. He seems to have taken the notion of "rule-governed polysemy" from Saussure. In *The Conflict of Interpretations*, when explicating the "mechanism of language" in the context of Saussurian linguistic, Ricœur cites Godel to explain that we are in an intermediate position between system and execution¹⁶²⁸, that is, between the synchronic structuration of a semantic field (stable at given points in time) and its renewal by use. Ricœur explains that rule-governed polysemy is at the crossroads of two processes. One of them is cumulative; it is a process of expansion. This is the case of "words which, because they signify too many things, cease to signify anything".¹⁶²⁹ However, this polysemy is limited because it is controlled by another process. If signs tend to expand, their fields tend to be limited. This is what, in Wittgensteinian and Post-Wittgensteinian philosophy is called a language game. Within a certain language game there are rules, and these rules decide which counts for what. Meanings can be cumulative, or some meanings can eliminate others. It is not a situation in which anything goes; but it is certainly a situation where there is space for renewal.

Ricœur many times analyzes applied cases of this polysemy. Let us recall that in *The Rule of Metaphor* Ricœur mentioned how, in the metaphoric process, the metaphoric meaning entered in conflict with literal meaning and eventually

¹⁶²⁸ See Ricœur, "The Problem of Double Meaning" in *The Conflict of Interpretations*, p. 69.

¹⁶²⁹ *Ibid.*

trumped it. Moreover, when he examines philosophical concepts, or even notions taken from ordinary language, frequently what he does is to try to find the rule-governed polysemy structuring them. Often, his starting point is language itself and its uses; and when he has found striking similarities between different uses of a given word, he tries to think them through philosophically. This is what he does both with the notion of self and selfhood in *Oneself as Another* and recognition in *The Course of Recognition*. In rule-governed polysemies, there is a dialectical interplay between identity and difference. In them, a given notion accepts different uses which ultimately are *analogical*. This means that these notions are not entirely univocal, or entirely equivocal. And all their richness is discovered precisely in the dialectical process (in the Platonic sense of the *Phaedrus*, in this case) of discovering, or establishing, their similarities and differences.

It might seem that this is a mere semantic phenomenon. But indeed it is not. We have seen before that Ricœur thinks that language is never for the sake of itself. Instead, language and semantics are grounded in reality and existence. And this is valid not only for the hermeneutics of the self, but for hermeneutics in general. Even when Ricœur goes further in his linguistification of reality (with the analogy of text to grasp action, and so on) never does he cease to bear in mind that this is always language grounded in reality, or opening up and revealing, maybe even instituting new domains of reality. This is evident when he speaks of the basic metaphoricity that structures reality, one of the bold claims of the 1970s. Ultimately, for Ricœur, language is polysemic because being itself is also polysemic. He very often quotes Aristotle's assertion that the meanings of being are analogical. Consequently, if the notion of conflict has many meanings, and if we can find these meanings in the history of philosophy and in the philosophy of Paul Ricœur himself, it is because conflict itself *has* – at least some – of the properties identified by all these authors. Because conflict, in each of these uses, occupies a specific place in the language games of these different philosophies and, furthermore, can sometimes extrapolate its situated and contextual character (its origin in each of the language games) and cut across them.

With these brief notes in mind, we will proceed to draft a provisional typology of conflict. We have seen how in Ricœur there are at least three main groups of conflicts, according to the course followed by the figures of conflict in the last parts: existential, hermeneutic and practical conflicts. This is, we could

say, a division of conflict according to its domain of occurrence, the domain in which they are felt, or to which they apply. But other classifications can be made. We can look at conflict through other angles. As we shall see, Ricœur both recognizes conflicts in their fertility, and want to solve or mediate them, while also allowing that some of them are irreducible. Let us see how in a more detailed fashion.

6.1 – The Typology of Conflict

Any typology of a philosophical notion is somewhat arbitrary and contingent. It depends on the criteria put forward and their processes of validation. Allow me to put forward the following tentative division: conflicts can be distinguished according 1) to their status (or, if we prefer a more traditional notion, their nature, or their *quid*); 2) origin; 3) domain(s) of application; 4) treatability (inside of which the possibility of productivity can be applied, or not, according to the case) and 5) results. In what concerns authors who spell out conflict theories, or use the notion of conflict in their works, they can be divided in those who merely acknowledge the existence of conflicts, and those who actively take part in them, and also between those who see in conflict the key to explain or even to transform reality, and those who see no such role, and instead view conflicts as being mere incongruities that need to be eliminated. Finally, in the case of authors like Ricœur, who, as we have seen, acknowledges the existence of so many different types of conflict, and uses this notion in such a wide array of different manners, we can also distinguish between cases of conflict they merely want to arbitrate, or cases of conflict in which they take sides, actively contributing to the “victory” of one side over the other. Allow me to explicate in a few words what these categories – five categories concerning conflicts themselves, and two other concerning the place of conflict in the work of different authors – mean, and to illustrate them by showing how each one of them allows us to answer specific questions.

Firstly, what I called the “status” or the “nature” of a conflict. This is, indeed, the primordial question that any typology must be able to answer: *what* is this conflict, i.e., *what type of conflict is it?* Allow me to distinguish, in this category, ontological and methodological conflicts. Ontological conflicts, in turn, can be understood in a strong or a weak sense. In a strong sense, ontological conflicts can perhaps be seen as metaphysical conflicts, those which, in certain philosophies, are taken to structure reality. These are the types of conflicts that we can probably find in Heraclitus, as we have seen in part one. His depictions of strife, war, conflict and so forth are so pervasive and play on so many different levels that we can affirm that for him conflict is indeed fundamental and

multilayered, dynamic and metaphysic. The same probably applies, with an infinitely greater degree of complexity, to Hegel and his process of *Aufhebung*. In a weak sense, the “ontology” of a given conflict is merely its definition, the determination of its *quid*. Or, if we prefer a more Heideggerian terminology, its “ontic” determination. In that sense, we say that a conflict is x and not y, so we are circumscribing it. In both these senses, what we do is to understand a conflict, to grasp it. On the other hand, when we speak about methodological conflicts, these are processes we can create, rather than only discovering them. A conflict of interpretations can be something which imposes itself on us, as it were; or it can be something we decide to promote, for creative or epistemic reasons. This is true in Ricœur, even though he does not spell this out thematically. Or for instance in Hunyadi, for whom the virtue of conflict discloses the normativity of rules. Can we not discover this normativity by willingly imposing a conflict of interpretations on it?

Secondly, we can ask about a conflict’s origin. This is its *terminus a quo*. That is, *whence* comes this conflict? Where does it come from? What is its origin? This has so many possible answers as the specific occurrences of conflict we have seen throughout this dissertation, and possibly many more. Conflicts can sprout from within or without human reality. To name only a few such origins: metaphysical conflicts, originating in struggles between gods and/or other mythic figures (Homer, Hesiod) or more anonymous and abstract forces (Heraclitus) such as determinations of Spirit itself (Hegel); they can be endogenous conflicts stemming from our psychic life, such as energetic conflicts between instincts (Freud) or conflicts of interpretation about the meaning of those conflicts, conflicts of our imaginary, and so forth; or they might come from the domain of action. These can structural impediments to our action in the world, such as the situations of domination. Or they can affect interaction, such as in the case of exacerbated struggle for recognition (Kojève) or assume other forms: discussion (Apel and Habermas) or more violent possibilities (such as Hobbes’s state of war of all against all).

In the third place we find the *terminus ad quem* of conflicts, i.e., where do conflicts apply, where are they felt, and where can we find the putative solutions to them? This is a domain which is coextensive with the first two. By this I mean that there are probably as many origins as there are domains of application of

conflicts and their respective solutions. But this does not mean that the area affected by conflict is exactly the same as its origin. For instance, a conflict originated in our psychic life can have effects not only in it, but also affect our action and interactions. Reciprocally, a solution to that conflict sought by our own (volitive) means – e.g., psychotherapy – can perhaps result in solving the conflict in both domains.

After we have sufficiently diagnosed the existence of conflicts, following the preceding stages: 1) they exist; 2) they are of nature x and y; 3) they originated in a given domain, and can affect some other areas (e.g. of our existence)... we can discuss our fourth category, their treatability. Now that a given conflict is identified, what should we *do* with it? Merely bear testimony to it, as Lyotard suggests, in the cases of differends? Should we let it be, or try to influence it? And what do we mean by influencing, or taking a part in it? Is this akin to dissolving it? The answer to these questions certainly depends on the nature of the type of conflict at hand and also on the results of such an intervention.

Again, to ask for the consequences or results of the conflict (or our intervention in its process) probably determines the answer to apply to the set of questions listed in the preceding paragraph. So the assessment of this fifth category influences all the preceding categories. What happens if we pursue the conflict and even attempt to carry it further? This amounts to putting forward counterfactual scenarios. A situation without conflict, would it result in a better or a worse scenario? And what about the means to end conflict, or to transform the situation, are they acceptable? This is where a whole host of ethical, and other types of criteria can be called to help determine the best possible course of action.

All the preceding types of question determine conflicts themselves. But we can also evaluate philosophies according to whether or not they leave or do not leave room for conflict, and see what *strategy* their authors pursue when dealing with (or ignoring) conflicts. In this category, we find authors who totally ignore (for voluntary or involuntary reasons) the existence of conflicts, and those who acknowledge them. Of those who concede that conflicts exist and are relevant, some think they explain (social or other type of) reality and must be used to transform it (Marx), others that they must be controlled (Hobbes) or if possible fully mitigated and solved (Rawls).

Finally, in the philosophies of those authors who acknowledge the

existence of conflicts there are those who, like Ricœur, sometimes merely arbitrate them, and other times take part in them. Other authors take more general positions. For instance, we can argue that Rawls and Habermas provide mostly procedural models aimed at finding a solid enough degree of generality to solve all conflicts (in specific domains of application, such as the redistribution of social goods, or the search of the best arguments in a situation of discussion) irrespective of one's particular position in the struggle – whether or not it is possible to fully occupy such a detached position, that is another question. On the other hand, for someone like Marx, who identifies the fundamental conflict between the owners of the means of production and those who sell their working force in order to make ends meet, it is not hard to foretell the engaged and indeed very active position he takes in this, or on whose side he is. Consequently, we can establish a distinction between authors who merely want to arbitrate or impartially assess conflicts from a detached standpoint, or those who take a passionate, or even partisan position within conflictual processes.

With this tentative grid of categories in mind, we could go back and re-read the preceding parts, asking to the many occurrences of philosophical conflicts we have seen the same general questions I am listing here: where do they come from, where are they felt, what should we do about them, and so forth. It is completely impossible and out of the scope of this very brief chapter to undertake such an analysis for all types of conflict, and all authors we have seen before. I think I sufficiently determined at least the *quid* of many of them in the preceding pages, even though I refrained from answering to all the questions in this grid, in each case. Furthermore, any such attempt at categorization is itself subject to a conflict of interpretations, and as such is nothing more than a possible reading. But before I delve into Ricœur's instantiations of conflict once again, I can further develop the example of Marx (easier to grasp than other authors, because it is more one-dimensional than many of them). Let us consider once again social conflict in Marx and provide a simplified reading of it, according to this grid. *What* is this conflict? It is an ontological conflict in which two classes almost represent two entities, namely, “capital” and “labor”. This ontological conflict is in turn grasped by a methodology that gives conflict a central role: “historical” or “dialectical” materialism, and its scientific pretensions. *Where* does it originate? In the economic infrastructure of societies, more specifically in the relation between

productive forces and means of production. Where is it *applied*? In those same societies, when the state of accumulated tension in latency bursts out in the open, and conflicts escalate. What can we *do* about it? For Marx, we should take part in it and in fact he, identifying himself with the interests of the Proletariat, did walk the walk. And where does it *lead* us, what is its *result*? For Marx, hopefully, it results on social revolution and thus in the overcoming of capitalism as a historical reality. It results in socialism, or in its endpoint, the communist society where man no longer has to endure exploitation. For Marx, moreover, this telos is well identified and this historical process allegedly necessary. This is, of course, only a possible reading of Marx, and indeed a very conventional one. It cannot lead us to ignore the tensions present in Marx's account, such as those I alluded to in part one: for instance, between determinism and free agency of social actors, and so on.

Now what typology of conflict can we draw from what we have seen in Ricœur's works? A first division is the one parts three, four and five have drawn. That is, the rough division into existential, hermeneutic and practical conflicts, which more or less amounts to the diachronic evolution of Ricœur's thought as it was being made. It has, as I noted, a vague circularity in it, insofar as the third moment renews with the first one, without however relinquishing what has been acquired in the second one, namely linguistification and the long detour. But now we can retrospectively assess it with the help of the grid put forward in this chapter.

Firstly, is conflict ontological in Ricœur? At least in the strong sense? The answer is yes, but it must be a qualified answer, as this matter evolved in his works, as did his take on ontology. Actually, I do not think we can say that Ricœur put himself at the level of a fundamental ontology, as did Heidegger, even if sometimes he hinted at it (for instance, when describing basic metaphoricity in the 1970s). Consequently, there is no "metaphysical" conflict in his works, in the same manner there is one in Heraclitus or Hegel. Be that as it may, there are in fact ontological assertions on conflict to be found in his works. In the third part we have seen this in his books on Jaspers, and the overarching role that conflict assumes in *Freedom and Nature*. The same also applies in *Fallible Man* with its conflict between finite perspective and infinite verb, which is a transcendental conflict, in the strong sense of the word. The conclusion to be drawn is that the ontological conflict detected by Ricœur is not so much metaphysical as it is

human. It touches on human affairs, and in a philosophical anthropology. And this even if it ventures to extend to specific domains, such as language. We recall from the fourth part Ricœur's assertion that language *is* broken and that this is what renders the conflict of interpretations inescapable. Ontology is postponed in *Oneself as Another*, as we know, but even there, the long detour and the long mediation across the other disciplines evolve through a revealing power of conflict.

This revealing power of conflict brings us to conflicts of another nature in Ricœur's thought, namely, methodological conflicts. We can, in a nutshell, argue that Ricœur *uses* the conflict of interpretations as a powerful motor of his own philosophy. And that indeed he almost always did so, even if he only thematically defined it in the hermeneutical phase. Already in *Freedom and Nature* he argued that it was the revealing power of conflict that helped him to phenomenologically delimitate the voluntary and the involuntary. However, this revealing power of conflict, this *detectivism*, to speak like Honneth, is complemented by a sort of *constructivism*. This means that Ricœur does not only *detect* conflicts. Sometimes, he also construes them, in order to make room for his own theoretical position. And this can even be a dialectical relation, in that it might be in the process of submitting something to a conflict of interpretations that the true constitution of something appears. This is akin to what Hunyadi called the virtue of conflict. And it means that there is a voluntary aspect of the conflict of interpretations which feeds Ricœur's perspectivism (close to Nietzsche's peculiar notion of objectivity) and whose result is an enlarged standpoint, as I argued in parts three and four, picking up the thread of an interpretation of Kant put forward by Arendt and Mário Jorge de Carvalho.

In what concerns the domains of origin and application of conflicts in Ricœur's works, as well as their treatability and alleged solutions, the three stages of the course of conflict should have demonstrated in a sufficient manner how radically plural they are. Conflict is given a proper ethos, and a certain productivity, right at the outset of the existential level, with the appraisal of Jaspers's loving struggle. At that stage, it stems from both an interpersonal and an existential level, and it comes to bear in our action and our relation with the history of philosophy. In *Freedom and Nature* and *Fallible Man* the many conflicts that phenomenology and philosophical anthropology reveal stem from

ethics, in the broadest sense (the conflict of values and modes of life, duties and the value of happiness, passion and the law, and so on) and affect our stance towards reality in general, and our perception of our position within it, and the possibilities for our action (saying yes to a world that says no). In *History and Truth* and later, in the hermeneutic phase, conflict stems from an appropriation of the history of philosophy and its properly philosophical assessment, and comes to bear on both an evaluation of reality, language (its broken character) and decide both the general status and the inner workings of the process of interpretation. This is evident in the way perspectives are enlarged by the process of the conflict of interpretations. Indeed, they find their domains of application in the conflicts *of* interpretations (the conflict between hermeneutics of suspicion and recollection or restoration of meaning, the conflicts between hermeneutics, psychoanalysis, structuralism and phenomenology) or conflicts *within* interpretation (the conflict between explanation and understanding and the hermeneutical arc of the second stage of Ricœur's hermeneutics). In the chapters on unconscious conflict and the traversal of psychoanalysis we have seen energetic conflicts originating in our psychic life, having effects in all our life, and eventually seeking cure through hermeneutic interpretation and/or psychoanalytical practice. In both chapters on the conflicted self we have seen how these psychic conflicts, and conflicts of interpretations in general affect our identity and how we are, as it were, torn between many different interpretations about our selves and our action, and how a sense of self must be won over in the fight against suspicion. Finally, in the last chapters of the practical conflict, we have seen conflicts originating in both fundamental ethics (the conflict of duties) and applied ethics (the conflict of norms in the medical and judicial domains) and being given practical solutions that involved adapting behavior and/or finding (or inventing) new rules.

Consequently, as we can see, Ricœur adopts mixed diagnoses and varying strategies according to the specific conflicts he is dealing with. Some conflicts, he argues, are ineluctable. This is the case of "tragic conflict", the "tragic of action". This is also, many times, the case of obeying laws in complex situations, hard cases in which following a rule automatically entails violating another one of a different order, and we are forced to make a decision. It is also the case of the conflict between application of an abstract law, and solicitude for the particular case of a given person. In the practical domain, moreover, Ricœur deems it fit to

detect conflicts, and evidently not to create new ones. If we are “acting and suffering human beings” there is no need to add further weight to the burden of suffering. In the theoretical domain, on the other hand, and as I just mentioned, this detectivism is complemented by a strategy of creating conflicts for epistemological reasons. That is, Ricœur sometimes opposes different theories in order to show their respective blind spots. Moreover, there are cases in which the *result* of the conflict is a creative new position: for instance, when interpretation is postulated as a result of the hermeneutic arc, i.e., when the different phases of explanation and understanding do add up and result in ever new, more complete interpretations. Or when from the conflict of duties and norms there is a new norm discovered or invented, through the application of a reflective judgment. These are conflicts in which Ricœur really displays a skill not only of arbitration, but really a creative talent, because from the arbitration and the setting up of limits and dialectical interaction, something new is put forward. But there are also other conflicts in which even though there is dialectical interaction, Ricœur really is taking sides and ultimately defending some positions in relation to others (whether or not he explicitly acknowledges this). This is the case when he defends hermeneutics as recollection of meaning and post-critical faith against hermeneutics of suspicion; hermeneutics against reductionist structuralism; the primacy of the teleological standpoint over the deontological one; or attestation, once again, over suspicion. In these cases, Ricœur is not so much the referee, as one of the parties, even though he adopts a mixed strategy of back and forth between the argumentative, interested position, and the allegedly more general and disinterested standpoint.

Ultimately, what are the provisional conclusions about the status of Ricœur’s philosophy, and of the way he deals with conflicts within it? What type of philosophy is it, and what are its more decisive conflicts, and their respective consequences?

Let me start by mentioning the most fundamental conflict for his theoretical framework. This is, without doubt, the conflict between Kant and Hegel that defined his self-professed paradoxical Post-Hegelian Kantianism. It is a conflict between Hegel’s all-encompassing, pervasive, creative dialectics ending up in the standpoint of the Absolute and Kant’s more sober philosophy of limits which refuses the totalization of any given object beyond the bounds of

experience, and ultimately results in the standstill of the antinomies. It is a conflict between limit and mediation, between creative production and the dispelling of temptation in the name of sobriety and, why not say it, a principle of reality anchored in a philosophy of finitude. Let us call this conflict, as it was understood and appropriated by Ricœur, the overarching theoretical conflict that defines the framework of his philosophy. If understood well, this conflict, which is twofold, allows us to grasp both Ricœur's methodological creativity and its inner delimitation. Providing the limits to his philosophy we find the Kantian grasp of conflict as reciprocal (de)limitation: never can we reach the standpoint of the Absolute and never can we proclaim to know total objects such as God or the immortality of the soul; *within* these strict limits Ricœur follows the Hegelian inspiration of conflict as a semi-formal dialectics moved by a dynamic of productive, creative opposition. Kant wins over Hegel in what comes down to the most fundamental question: Kant's critical philosophy draws an inner delimitation of the outer contours of philosophy's legitimate domain, against Hegel's pretensions. What we cannot know, we can only believe or hope for. But ultimately, Hegel's pervasive, dialectical – if you allow the wordplay –, partial victory consists in this: all that happens *within* these strict limits provided by the Kantian framework is a result of the Hegelian inspiration of creative conflict. This is, of course, a very formal description. And even Hegelian dialectics taken up as a “fragmentary dialectics”, without *Aufhebung* would assume different forms and be more influential in some domains than others, depending on how far Ricœur is willing to recover Hegel in a particular sphere. For instance, as we have seen, Ricœur thinks that the domain of the “objective spirit”, namely that of action, freedom and institutions, and the intersubjective background that frames it (recognition-patterns, the recovery of the *Sittlichkeit*, and so forth) are the privileged domain of Hegelian dialectics, and in these domains he allows himself to recover Hegel, at least partially, in both form *and* content. In the rest of his philosophy, Hegelian dialectic's form and content would be somewhat truncated, but its inspiring intention was there, moving Ricœur.

Now, as I just said, this is only a formal description of the creativity promoted by Ricœur's appropriation of Hegelian dialectic. Indeed, this form will have to be filled with a particular content and help determine it; if the Hegelian content and overambitious claims are for the most part set aside, Ricœur and his

philosophy of finitude inspired by Kant, Husserl, Jaspers and so many others would find its privileged instantiations in hermeneutics. With hermeneutic philosophy and the meaningful analyses of language, imagination and semantic innovation, Ricœur's philosophy is pervaded by many creative conflicts that provide the flesh to the bones of his antithetical philosophy.

Within this antithetical, hermeneutic, creative philosophy many other conflicts take place, as we have seen in part four. I will still come back to one of them in the next part, the conflict between belonging and distancing in hermeneutics, and its consequences for a project of practical philosophy. We should bear in mind that the insistence on conflict and negativity notwithstanding, Ricœur still wagers on the primacy of affirmation over negation (like he did in *History and Truth*) and on the inescapability of our rooting in pre-existing conditions of belonging. But for now I will just emphasize the dialectical counterparts to the notion of conflict.

6.2 – From Conflict to Conciliation and Back Again

Throughout this thesis we have seen the contributions of many authors who reappraised and used the notion of conflict in their philosophies, and their interpretations of human action and interaction. I said in the previous section that one of the distinctions that the typology of conflict allows pertains to the way in which conflicts can or cannot be treated, and the strategies put forward by the philosophers who “deal” or at least acknowledge the existence of conflicts.

On this matter, I think we can say more or less the same thing Ricœur stated about the presence or absence of the *cogito* in several philosophies: that there is always either too much or too little of it.¹⁶³⁰ What is more, even the role that conflict occupies in each of these philosophies is subject to conflicts of interpretation. Honneth’s social philosophy, and namely the figure of the struggle for recognition in it, is a case in point. In parts one and two, as well as in part five, I treated the topic of the struggle for recognition as one of the main figures which conflict assumes in philosophy and social theory, today as in the past. And we have seen how there are different treatments of this topic, and different depictions of how to understand the conflictual processes in it. If, on the one hand, interpreters like Robert Williams see in recognition a positive form of intersubjective relations at work in all of Hegel’s philosophy, other people like Kojève stress the inherently conflictual part of it. And Honneth, in turn, sees an inherent interaction between development through the struggle for recognition and the apparition of new forms of social integration. And while he himself refuses to accept that his theory does not leave enough space for conflicts, some other interpreters of his philosophy, such as Bertram and Celikates, argue that reconciliation plays too big a role in his philosophy and that Honneth does not sufficiently take into account the generative power of conflict precisely because, at each step, it seems as if the new forms of integration are the conciliatory goal of the struggle for recognition. In what comes down to this topic, as we have also seen in part five, Ricœur insists even more in conciliation than Honneth, because his alternative to the model of the struggle for recognition is precisely the model of the states of peace of mutual recognition through symbolic exchange.

¹⁶³⁰ Ricœur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 4.

As such, if we take a retrospective look on the authors analyzed in this dissertation and their respective takes and strategies on conflict, we see many different possibilities. On one of its extreme points, we find people who acknowledge conflicts, but seem to want to avoid them at all costs, and develop strategies that if followed – at least this appears to be their belief – would allow for conflict to be not only tackled, but eliminated. This seems to be Rawls's position, and the many strategies he puts forward, from the veil of ignorance and the original position, to reflective equilibrium and overlapping consensus, are likely to be an attempt to devise a complex enough model to solve conflicts in each case. In Habermas matters are somewhat more complicated because he undergoes a significant intellectual evolution. But even though he almost always speaks about the interest in emancipation, the truth is that ever since his Kantian turn, his efforts (even those of the ethics of discussion) seem to be geared towards the construction of a procedural model to deal with (and perhaps eliminate) conflicts.

On the other extreme we find authors who plead for a deepening of conflicts. This is the case of Marx. If what we want is a revolution, the way to force it is to exacerbate conflicts. In that case, and in the context of "bourgeois" societies riddled by class conflicts, the worse the situation gets... the better it will be, on his account. In a different way, authors like Celikates and Bertram, and even Rancière, also plead for a deepening of conflicts, because they see them as productive and possibly positive. The same can be said for authors who couple the productivity of conflict with the appearance of better outcomes. This is evidently the case for Hegel and his rationalized version of History. It is also the case for Honneth, and perhaps even the later Foucault and the early Habermas, insofar as they all seem to see in political resistance and struggle the possibility of at least partial emancipation. In a different way, this is also true of Hunyadi and his "virtue of conflict". Other authors also recognize conflicts but take a more pessimistic account on them. This is the case of Adorno and his negative dialectics, as well as Lyotard and the main possibility he recognizes to deal with conflict, namely testifying about it. Of course that all these different positions are adopted not only because authors have a different "attitude" towards conflicts, but also because they are dealing with different types of conflict, as I think should be clear from the reading of this dissertation.

And so the time has come to pose the following question: amid this

somewhat complex cartography, what is the position occupied by Ricœur? In this short section I want to argue that in his nuanced and plural accounts of conflict, he is in fact closer to those authors who recognize conflicts but see in them both the possibilities of negative and positive phenomena. Suffering is a negative phenomenon, and the tragic of action too. The inner rift of the conflicted self, and psychic conflict can cause suffering and, as such, be entirely negative. But over and above suspicion and inner rift there is the possibility of attestation of the self, out of the tragic of action there can sprout a creative invention of behavior and rules, and so forth. As such, and as I have argued before, perhaps the best way to capture the specific dynamic of Ricœur's thought is to depict it as being a dialectic between conflict and conciliation, one in which, in methodological terms, conflict is the guiding procedure but that never ceases to try and find mediations and new solutions to specific problems.¹⁶³¹

This is, furthermore, a consequence of Ricœur's attitude towards philosophy (and life, why not mention it) in general: an attitude that is encapsulated in the formula according to which man is "la joie du oui dans la tristesse du fini". Ultimately, primary affirmation trumps negativity. As such, and even if conflicts are primarily negative phenomena which cannot be ignored, there is, more often than not, the possibility to turn them into positive phenomena. And thus, to be able to say yes, *in spite of* negativity. Consequently, if there are many forms of conflict in Ricœur's works, and if they have been listed for the most part in this dissertation, there are also many forms of conciliation, or mediation, which accompany them. Ricœur explicitly stated this in his first books on Marcel, as we have seen in part three. Even in *Freedom and Nature*, the figure of paradox, taken from Jaspers, and which is a somewhat conflictual figure, had as its dialectical counterpart the figure of mystery, and Ricœur often spoke at this time about the "secret conciliation" of philosophy.

As time went by, and as he probably wanted to distance himself more both from Hegel(ianism) and from what could be dubbed an overt "Christian philosophy", that is, as he traversed the hermeneutic turn and the thematic discovery of the broken character of language and its inherent conflict of interpretations, Ricœur dropped this language of "secret conciliation". But if, at

¹⁶³¹ See Gonçalo Marcelo, "From Conflict to Conciliation and Back Again: Some Notes on Ricœur's Dialectic" in *Revista Filosófica de Coimbra* 38 (2010): 341-366.

this point in time, conflict became a more encompassing methodological tool as the ontological claims began to be toned down, the truth is that the figures of conciliation undertook a similar turn, and continued accompanying conflict. Thus, at least in a way, symbols conciliate conflicts of interpretations in the first phase of his hermeneutic theory, interpretation conciliates the modes of explanation and understanding in the second phase, psychoanalytic theory and practice provide (at least hope for) a conciliation of ourselves through a resolution of our inner conflicts, even if this comes at the price of a hard recognition of truth and an abandonment of illusion; similarly, in his practical philosophy the attestation of our capacities is a response to suspicion which conciliates us with the existence of our own identity in the mode of ipseity, judicial and juridical intervention are a way to peacefully solve conflicts and at least in a partial way to conciliate the litigants and to contribute to social peace, and in the *Course of Recognition* the clearings of recognition and the “states of peace” can be seen as partial pauses in the struggle where both parties in conflict recognize each other and are at least partially conciliated.

Why do I insist on saying that conciliations are “partial”? Because at both the theoretical and the practical level, Ricœur claims, mediations are “fragile” and “provisional”, as he states in *Amour et justice*. This means that the possibility of conflict is so widespread that there is always the possibility of conflict’s second coming. And this, in itself, can be good or bad. At the hermeneutical level of the conflict of interpretations, it is in itself a creative phenomenon. Through metaphors, narratives and the dialectic between explanation and understanding, new conciliations are new provisional interpretations that at a given moment take shape. And new critiques and conflicts are the procedures which will destabilize these prior forms and keep the movement of reinterpretation going. As such, this can be an unending process. But this is not necessarily a negative phenomenon. Quite the contrary. It is what keeps interpretation dynamic. If, on the other hand, in the practical domain, a fragile equilibrium of peace between two parties at war ends up in a rekindling of social conflict, this is probably a bad phenomenon, as peace can be an end in itself. But even this might be contested, since, arguably, in some situations a position of resistance can be a better solution, and lead to a better result, than, for instance, an unjust occupation.

Ultimately, there is one step which Ricœur never takes, and this is to

postulate the possibility of a full and total reconciliation (of everything: thought, reality, praxis, and so forth). This would be tantamount, perhaps, to the last stage of Hegel's philosophy. And this Ricœur refuses to accept, for reasons explained above. But as he makes clear in one interview with Olivier Abel, mentioned by Dosse, and which I quote in the epigraph of this dissertation, we cannot think about conflict, if we do not also at the same time think about the possibility of reconciliation. This is a bold claim. It means that these notions are connected almost in a transcendental manner. But, reinforcing his Kantian stance, Ricœur also states that this cannot really be fully instantiated in real institutions. That is, even if we pose it as an ideal, it is an asymptotic ideal. Even if the desire for just institutions is part of our aiming for the good life, even if we ultimately want to be reconciled (with ourselves, with one another, and so forth) this is always an asymptotic ideal. And this is the reason why, refusing to objectify what we cannot know, there is a number of things we can only *hope* for. Reconciliation is one of those things. This does not mean that we cannot strive for it in practice. Ricœur often speaks about forgiveness. A "difficult" forgiveness, it is true, but a possible forgiveness after all. And one which is eventually considered to be one of our main capacities.

As such, for me at least, in my individual reading, Ricœur's supple, complex thought revolves around a multi-layered dialectic between conflict and conciliation. Acknowledging conflicts, calling our attention to their huge importance, but also trying to deal with them and to posit the possibility of conciliations, while at the same time also indicating the limits to this approach. Displaying trust in action and in our power to attest our capacities. But never forgetting that we are always "acting and suffering" human beings.

At the end of the sixth part of this dissertation, the multilayered complexity of conflict phenomena and their interpretation has become apparent. Conflict can be seen as a process structuring reality and guiding human relations. Ricœur, for his part, acknowledges its presence, tries to mitigate or solve practical conflicts in human reality in order to minimize suffering, and uses the conflict of interpretations as a methodological tool to enlarge the domain of the thinkable and to provide new solutions to theoretical problems with which he is confronted. In order to do that, he resorts to mediation (the dialectical crisscrossing between the different positions in conflict), most notably of which in his famous *long route*;

but also to conciliation properly speaking. Conciliation must be here understood in two different ways. In the practical domain, conciliation is intrinsically connected with a horizon of peace. It is accomplished and maintained through practices of intersubjective cooperation and the maintenance of just institutions. It likely entails the exercise of power in common that Ricœur calls for in *Oneself as Another*, and can perhaps find a metaphoric and / or utopian model in the states of peace of *The Course of Recognition*. As we have seen in part five, these states are envisaged as only provisory “clearings” amid what is otherwise an inherent struggle; be that as it may, conciliation is, in the practical domain, a goal that Ricœur puts forward.

In the theoretical domain, however, the dialectic between conflict and conciliation is, in my opinion, constitutive of Ricœur’s thought, taken as a whole. In order to grasp this, we have to position ourselves in the hermeneutical conflict of interpretations, taken at a methodological level. If, as I stated before, there is an intrinsic constructivism in the process of the conflict of interpretations, and if what is at stake is solving theoretical problems by providing innovative solutions, it is in my belief that Ricœur often resorted to a back and forth dialectical movement between conflicts and conciliations. If there is a phenomena of overdetermination of symbols, cultural artifacts and so forth, and if only a theoretical pluralism can provide the right solution to this problem, Ricœur’s provisional conciliations of different theories in conflict amount to his own interpretations of the phenomena at stake. However, since every interpretation can in turn be challenged, when rethinking his own positions, or the positions of others (through the act of reading, debating, and so forth) Ricœur reassessed ancient positions, trying to think them anew. That is, he challenged previously established theoretical conciliations, by reintroducing the process of the conflict of interpretations.

This is, in a nutshell, my interpretation of his overall methodology. By going from conflict to conciliation and back again, his philosophy was able to constantly put forward new interpretations and strive to do justice to a project of informed original thinking – even though this is my own assessment, not Ricœur’s depiction of it.

Part Seven

Critical Remarks

In the last part I tried to offer a synchronic approach of Ricœur's philosophy, through a systematization of my rational hermeneutical reconstruction and discussion of his thought, and namely of the conflicts present in it, how they reveal the core cartography and dynamic of his philosophy, and also the meaningful ways he attempts to deal with them. Now I want to offer the dialectical counterpart of last chapter, by pointing out not so much the consistency, fertility and overall richness and brilliance of his thought (I think that work is done) but rather by signaling some discrepancies in it, and also some of the points in which I distance myself (a little) from his philosophy.

As I stated before, Ricœur's is a very balanced philosophy, halfway between many theoretical influences and somehow trying to juggle them together in his creative solutions, and many times doing his best to manage fragile mediations and unstable balances. This is *his* way of orienting himself in thought and being a radical pluralist and believing in the conflict of interpretations; he would never have thought that this should be, strictly speaking, any one else's position in philosophy. Or, better put, we can admire his style and erudition, and agree with many of his claims, either in general or specific terms, without however having to adhere to them *as a whole*, in every detail. This is made even more obvious by the fact that his is no systematic thought, by the fact that clearly he sometimes changed ideas and by the recognition that if looked at from a diachronic point of view, contradictions in his thought will evidently appear.

As such, in my opinion, one can still claim to be inspired by "Ricœurianism"¹⁶³² or even to be "Ricœurian" in a narrow sense, while simultaneously expressing disagreement with the positions taken by Ricœur at some point. Indeed, given his to and fro in some key areas, some of these "disagreements" might stem only from a decision to leave his middle ground in

¹⁶³² I am not sure if this word has been used before and I admit its strangeness, but perhaps it is now time to coin some expression to express Ricœur's philosophy taken as a whole, its overall tone and the whole complex of theoretical and practical questions (including its problems and contradictions) that it puts forward.

some areas, and to take a left turn in a crossroad where he kept dialectically zigzagging between left and right. This is precisely what I intend to do in this short part of this thesis. In its two brief sections I will ask two main questions: how radical is Ricœur's hermeneutics? And how "critical" is his "critical theory" – even though I am fully aware that Ricœur never really wanted to develop a "radical hermeneutics", or even a "critical theory" for that matter.

Nonetheless, since other authors before me tried to develop critical projects inspired by Ricœur, and since I do think that these projects can be spelled out and put forward using some of the tools he provided us, I want to ask these questions as critical assessments of his philosophy in order to, in a second moment, better situate myself against that backdrop.

7.1 – How Radical is Ricœur’s Hermeneutics? Reassessing the Dialectic Between Belonging and Distanciation

The first example of this balanced position, in which Ricœur keeps going from one pole to the other, can be found in his hermeneutics, which wants to encompass both a position of hearing, understanding and recollecting, and another one of suspecting, criticizing and distancing (eventually later complemented by a moment of appropriation). He sometimes argues that we need to do both: to hear and to criticize. Many times, he also states that critique is a second moment, mediating between a naïve first moment (of conviction, for instance) and a critical, better equipped third moment, which appears after innocence is lost by its being put to the critical test. As one of the paradigmatic moments of this polarity, I will choose the dialectic between belonging and distanciation. Indeed, it might seem that this is really a middle ground which is occupied by Ricœur. And indeed in some texts it is, and “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideologies” is one such case. In the following pages I will argue for the need to actually choose the pole of distanciation (without however dropping the fact that we still need to start from the pole of belonging) and deepen it. But in order to show the differences with one of the positions adopted by Ricœur, I will tackle one of the texts in which Ricœur actually shows himself to be radically... on the side of belonging. This is the case of “Science and Ideology”.

In “Science and Ideology”¹⁶³³ Ricœur undertakes yet another assessment of the phenomenon of ideology. As in his other texts on this matter, he aims at criticizing ideologies, while also leaving open the possibility that they fulfill a positive, constitutive role, as a function of reproductive social imagination. For reasons similar to those I spelled out in parts one and two of this thesis, when assessing Marx’s own standpoint on the critique of ideologies, he totally refuses to adopt a position akin to that of Marx or Althusser, i.e., to oppose to ideology an alleged “scientific” position – whether this is the supposed scientific standpoint of dialectical materialism or any other type of “scientific”, “objective” stance on ideology which would assume (and reserve for itself) the extravagant possibility of placing its own perspective *outside* of any type of ideology whatsoever, as it were.

¹⁶³³ Ricœur, “Science and Ideology”, in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, pp. 222-246.

For Ricœur this is itself an illusory position since he believes that ideology is first and foremost a positive, constitutive function of the social imaginary, and because of that we can never be *completely* rid of ideologies. What we can do, on the other hand, is to try to detect those ideologies which are really pathological, secondary and distorted reified forms. *Those* we can legitimately criticize. But this is done by playing the ideological (or utopian) game, not by pretending to be outside of it. This much, I think, is a crystal clear position.

However, in this article Ricœur goes a little further when criticizing the “scientific” takes on the critique of ideology. Firstly, he states that ideology “operates behind your backs, rather than appearing as a theme before our eyes” and that we “think from it, rather than about it”.¹⁶³⁴ As such, it tends to conceal itself and since one of its functions is to perpetuate a founding act “in the mode of representation”, it ultimately is both “interpretation of the real and obturation of the possible”.¹⁶³⁵ He then proceeds to criticize those who, criticizing ideologies, surreptitiously claim that historical agents have no real subjectivity¹⁶³⁶ but at the same time pretend to have risen to a subjectless (that is, “objective”) discourse from which they exercise their critiques.

Then, in a second moment, he turns against the possibility of critique as a combatant science, arguing that if we exercise critique in such a manner, then we cannot “avoid surrendering it to the quasi-pathological phenomena denounced in the adversary’s camp”.¹⁶³⁷ To be sure, he does clarify that by “combatant science” he means the Leninist interpretation of Marxism, which he connects directly with Althusser; his foe in this article is thus the scientific postulation of the “epistemological break” and so forth. In “partisan science” Ricœur sees the risk of Marxism becoming itself... ideological. Thus Marxism as the “science of the party” gets lambasted, as well as its own oversimplifications, such as the division of societies in two rigid classes. His conclusion is that after Marx, orthodox Marxism paradoxically became one of the greatest examples of an ideological type of discourse.¹⁶³⁸ To be clear, Ricœur aims his attacks precisely at orthodox Marxism, and not at other forms of Marxism. Indeed, he actually pleads for an

¹⁶³⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 227.

¹⁶³⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶³⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 233.

¹⁶³⁷ *Ibid.*, p. 235.

¹⁶³⁸ *Ibid.*, p. 236.

unorthodox Marxism, more or less in the same vein as the one defended by critical theorists. But in order for it to be valid, he claims, it must be dissociated from the exercise of power, authority and enforced orthodoxy. That much is clear, and I see no reason to criticize this position.

However, the last pages of this article are proof of an even deeper criticism. Firstly, he argues that since the social bond is itself symbolic, it is futile to try to reach “reality” beyond symbolism. He explicitly claims that there is an “impossibility of reaching a social reality prior to symbolization”.¹⁶³⁹ Consequently, as we can see, this is not only the linguistification of action at its height, but also a linguistification of society, and indeed reality, at its apex. It is, obviously enough, a problematic contention, and it is at odds with some of Ricœur’s phenomenological studies, where he sometimes argues that there are pre-linguistic layers of reality, perceived through passive syntheses, and so on.

But the critique of critique goes on. According to Ricœur, there is an “impossibility of exercising a critique which would be absolutely radical” because such a critique would entail a “total reflection”.¹⁶⁴⁰ Again, in my opinion, this is a very problematic claim. According to Ricœur, any critique which wants to be “radical” surreptitiously acquires totalizing pretensions; and these pretensions infringe upon his philosophy of limits, as we have seen in part one of this thesis. It is not very clear how this should be so. In order to spell out this argument, Ricœur invokes Ladrière and his distinction between two models of explanation: that in terms of projects and that in terms of systems.¹⁶⁴¹ According to him, both involve pretensions of totalization, and the contemporary forms of Marxism (those of Ricœur’s time) appear to him as falling prey to this desire of totalization, because they offer explanations either in terms of projects, or in terms of systems.

That this is the case of explanations in terms of systems, I think is a rather undisputable argument. A system, by definition, aims at completion. That this is the case of a project, on the other hand, seems to me incomprehensible. Here is the claim and its justification:

Explanation in terms of projects is necessarily an explanation in which the theoretician

¹⁶³⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 237.

¹⁶⁴⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 238.

¹⁶⁴¹ Ricœur is here recurring to Jean Ladrière, “Signes et concepts en Science” in *L’articulation du sens* (Paris: Cerf, 1970), pp. 40-50.

implicates himself, hence requiring that he clarify his own situation and his own project in relation to that situation. It is here that the unstated presupposition of total reflection intervenes.¹⁶⁴²

Why does this require “total reflection”? The claim is unclear. Either Ricœur is claiming that in order for one to be involved in a project, and to explain his or her action in terms of that project, one needs to be *totally* clear about oneself, or that he or she needs to be *totally* clear about the situation in which he or she is put (which then entails a total clarification of reality, in order that one be able to understand oneself within it). Again, this strikes me as valid within a, so to speak, “scientific” and/or “systematic” take on human action and its consequences. Such a stance would be, in my opinion (and agreeing here with Ricœur) overambitious. But why should this be the case with an explanation which involves projects? Must a subjective motivation for one’s engaged action and the postulation of a project which orients action *really* entail an elusive and hidden pretention of totalization in theoretical terms? I do not think so, and if I here distance myself from Ricœur, I am also, *eo ipso*, in a situation of *Ricœur contra Ricœur*, because in other works he does uphold the project of emancipation as viable and indeed a necessary task to be espoused by hermeneutics, as we have seen above.

Be that as it may, in “Science and Ideology” Ricœur explicitly puts himself in the position of an hermeneutics of historical understanding which ultimately does not leave enough space for the critical exercise. According to him, this is “a relation of *belonging* upon which we can never entirely reflect”.¹⁶⁴³ In the last analysis, in this article, he does not completely renounce the idea of interests of reason, or the possibility of acting through projects, or even the interest in emancipation.¹⁶⁴⁴ But he does argue that we can never sever our ties with belonging, and thus that “ideology always remains the grid, the code of interpretation”.¹⁶⁴⁵ It is my *Sittlichkeit*, Ricœur claims. Curiously enough, and adopting a dubious wordplay, he claims that even if this is so, and if we must recognize it, we still need “distancing”. But he severely curtails the possibilities of critique, by criticizing its “arrogance” and, at the same time, severing the position

¹⁶⁴² Ricœur, “Science and Ideology”, p. 238.

¹⁶⁴³ *Ibid.*, p. 243.

¹⁶⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 245.

¹⁶⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

of “distancing” from the exercise of “critique”. His final sentence in this article states: “nothing is more necessary today than to renounce the arrogance of critique and to carry on with patience the endless work of distancing and renewing our historical substance”.¹⁶⁴⁶

If we decide to undertake an exercise in psychologism and try to find Ricœur’s intentions behind the text (always a dubious method) we can perhaps find the motivation for these attacks in a criticism of orthodox Marxism, and namely Althusser’s. Ricœur does not think it is possible to renounce our *Sittlichkeit* and his target is the overambitious “scientific” claims of forms of thought which, for their arrogance, risk becoming (or indeed do happily become) totalitarian. That might be a partially valid reason for this virulent attack. But in this Ricœur risks, so to speak, throwing out the baby with the bathwater. Because, after all, what would philosophy, and indeed human action be, without the dynamism of critique even in its sometimes extreme forms?

Ricœur is more comfortable with reconstruction than with Heidegger’s *Destruktion* or Derrida’s *deconstruction*, and even though he uses suspicion, he handles it with care. But can we not argue that such as he many times calls for utopia to dethrone ideology, can it not be possible that sometimes, in some situations, what is called for is precisely a *radical* critique? Or even, that in some practical situations, the orientation by projects – arrogant or not, is that even the important matter? – is a valuable guidance, and indeed does *not* necessarily entail an implicit or explicit effort at totalization? In this article, Ricœur seems to fall prey – and this is almost never the case within his philosophy – to the straw man fallacy. However, as is obvious and as I mentioned many times throughout this thesis, in many other places we find positive assessments of the function of critique in his philosophy.

Nonetheless, taking into account this typified and somewhat caricatured version of critique he presents in this article, I will have the opportunity to present a different take on a hermeneutical social philosophy in the next part of this thesis. But this already provides an occasion to discuss exactly how critical is Ricœur’s critical theory, and how radical his hermeneutics is.

As these few lines above already hint, I envisage the relation between

¹⁶⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 246.

belonging and distancing in a slightly different manner. Of course that we are not born nowhere. No man is born in Rawls's original position. We are the product of historical societies, with their concrete values and practices. As such, we *belong* to somewhere; that much is granted. However, my claim is that we need to further develop the pole of distancing. Ricœur admits that distancing is productive and he often equates distancing with methodology and critique. As such, he admits that it is distancing, for instance within the scope of a theory of reading, that brings about new interpretations. As such, it is one of the processes of perspective enlargement and renovation of meaning. In the first phase of his hermeneutical theory, and of his hermeneutics of the self, he also grounds semantics in existence, as we saw. But what he never does is to draw all the existential consequences of a serious and radical use of distancing and critique. Within the scope of that first phase of his hermeneutics, one of the criteria to validate good theories amid the conflict of interpretation was their disclosing power. If a given theory was able to reveal a certain aspect of myself which, without it, would remain silent and unknown, then this theory would be valid (at least within certain limits). This is what allows him to validate psychoanalysis, at least up to some extent. But if this is the case, couldn't a relentless use of critique (exercised, after all, in the name of truth and justice, even if these are only yet another asymptotic ideals) result in such a radical alteration of our perspective that it would ultimately lead to a profound revision of our point of departure? Of our condition of belonging (of our identification with certain values, practices, and so forth)?

In other words, what Ricoeurian hermeneutics does not sufficiently take into account is the experience of *conversion* (by which I do not necessarily mean the religious experience, *strictu sensu*, but rather the deep change in convictions, whatever its nature). As we have seen, convictions are very important for Ricœur, as is our point of departure and our condition of belonging. In *Oneself as Another*, convictions are recuperated in a revised form, after the critical moment. They are no longer naïve convictions, but, so to speak, "informed" convictions which have traversed the proof of critique. But the question then is: how seriously does Ricœur take into account the possibility that the traversal of critique *really* radically transforms our spontaneous conviction? Can it not be that in this process I convert myself to another ideal or value, if I see that my point of departure,

indeed my condition of belonging and adhering to something was proven wrong? And if this possibility is totally out of my reach will not my hermeneutical positioning ultimately reveal itself to be more closed, less receptive of otherness than what I would like to admit? If critique proves me wrong, can or should my initial position survive just out of tenacity? Would this not be, alas, a profession of bad fate?

I understand that this depiction might be problematic to what is usually called the “hermeneutical circle”, i.e., of believing to understand and vice-versa. However, if this circle is to function in a virtuous and not a vicious way (as Ricœur and hermeneutical philosophers contend) the possibility of radical revision of the starting point needs to be left open. Any other positioning amounts to bad faith. I do not believe that Ricœur fell into this position in his own practice. He actually changed ideas a lot, in spite of the more or less coherent synchronic account I provided in the last part. What I am doing now is only to pinpoint the problems in a very specific part of his hermeneutical theory, and trying to reformulate matters in a slightly different manner.

Now, by emphasizing the pole of distancing what I am also doing, obviously, is accentuating the pole of critique. And what I am proposing to spell out is a more radical version of hermeneutics; allow me to call it, for lack of a better designation, a “radical hermeneutics”, even though this should not be mistaken with John Caputo’s own project¹⁶⁴⁷; a hermeneutics suitable to found a

¹⁶⁴⁷ See John D. Caputo, *Radical Hermeneutics. Repetition, deconstruction and the hermeneutic project* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1987). Caputo indeed spells out the project of a radical hermeneutic, but one whose emphasis is different from mine. He claims that part of his project entails reminding us that life is difficult (see his introduction, “Restoring Life to Its Original Difficulty”, pp. 1-10). According to him, his project should be understood as a prolongation of Heidegger’s *Destruktion* and Derrida’s deconstruction. Through *epoché*, he wants to radically criticize the metaphysics of presence and the “given”. He wants us to consider ourselves as a question (like in Augustine) and therefore insists in the “differences”, “ruptures” and “abysses” which he claims constitute us. As such, he attempts to radicalize Derrida’s *différance* and to apply it to our own existence. I am sympathetic towards his project, insofar as it insists on the hardship of life, and the criticism of the given. However, I have different starting and ending points in my own reflection. Caputo follows the thread Kierkegaard-Husserl-Heidegger-Derrida and he distances himself both from Gadamer and Ricœur, because they are allegedly thinkers of the “metaphysics of presence”. I do not think this is entirely fair and, as is evident, I take Ricœur as my point of departure, in order to afterwards emphasize one of the points he puts forward. Ultimately, Caputo also wants to go beyond critique and nihilism and he comes back to the topic of mystery. Consequently, his ultimate project entails a blurring of the limits between philosophy and theology. As for me, I keep my emphasis on critique and Critical Theory. Caputo ultimately anticipates his point of arrival (encountering in the abyss the religious element). I honestly do not know if we can anticipate that point of arrival, even though we formulate projects. Because the results might be surprising, the questions must be, in my opinion, open-ended. Finally, and even

specific type of Critical Theory. I will spell this out in more detail in the next part. But for now allow me to question Ricœur's own critical theory.

though I eventually mildly criticize Ricœur, it goes without saying that I do not find him to be as conservative or irrelevant as Caputo seems to imply. Ultimately, my project is also post-metaphysical, like the ones of Habermas and Honneth; this is not the case for Caputo. My last point of connection with him is to be found in the reappraisal of humor and irony as denunciations of the given (something which he recuperates from Kierkegaard and Nietzsche). In that point, I totally agree with him.

7.2 – How Critical is Ricœur’s Critical Theory?

The title of this section might be unfair and somewhat misleading, because Ricœur never claimed to be a “critical theorist”. Nonetheless, he himself asserted in “Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideologies” that he wanted to put forward a “critical hermeneutics” and this project has been further developed by John B. Thompson.¹⁶⁴⁸ Such a project interests me very much because, as I see it, a “radical hermeneutics” is also, certainly, a “critical hermeneutics”, for reasons I explain in the next section. Since Ricœur claimed to want to undertake such a project, and since there is indeed the possibility to at least find in Ricœur the elements to reconstruct a version of a “Critical Theory” in his writings, an effort forcefully spelled out by David Kaplan¹⁶⁴⁹, the question thus begs to be asked: how critical is his Critical Theory? At the same time, answering this question will allow me to detect a few more tensions in Ricœur’s own standpoint.

Let me start with these critical remarks in order to afterwards move on to Ricœur’s Critical Theory and the way his philosophy must be interpreted if it is to lead the way to a truly Critical Theory. Firstly, Ricœur is not always entirely clear about his own standpoint and procedures. He almost always claims playing a role of arbitration in the conflict of interpretations but, as we have seen, many times he is actually committed to one of the sides. Furthermore, he also does not always spell out the criteria that could validate theories amid the conflict of interpretations. For instance, as we have seen, in *Interpretation Theory* he mentions Hirsch’s topic of subjective validation and stresses the need for some “rules of thumb” but he falls short of elaborating them. For this reason, we are left wondering what these might be. Thirdly, there is a tension in Ricœur’s account of freedom and in other related accounts. Even though they are situated at different levels, there is a certain discrepancy between Ricœur’s insistence on consenting to necessity (in *Freedom and Nature*) alongside his apology of a “loving obedience” (in *Thinking Biblically*), and the more voluntarist emphasis on human capacities in *Oneself as Another*, complemented by the exploration of recognition and the assertion of “rights to capabilities” in *The Course of Recognition*.

¹⁶⁴⁸ See John B. Thompson, *Critical Hermeneutics. A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricœur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1981).

¹⁶⁴⁹ See David M. Kaplan, *Ricœur’s Critical Theory* (Albany: State University of New York Press, 2003).

Finally, there is also a certain lack of radicality in the passage from some of the adhesions of his youth and the positions of his maturity. For instance, in political terms, and as Johann Michel has argued, there is a “Rawlsian turn”¹⁶⁵⁰ in Ricœur and within this turn, and the partial conversion of Ricœur to political liberalism, there is something of the emphasis on critique of the social reality and of the push for political equality that is lost, and that was present in his early years. Even the insistence on the hermeneutics of suspicion, and in the interest of reason in emancipation, became less and less frequent in Ricœur as years went by. At the ontological level, Ricœur’s prudence in *Oneself as Another* is only the culmination of a process of toning down of some of his more radical claims. For instance, the level of radicality of the proposal of “basic metaphoricity” found in *The Rule of Metaphor* is not to be found elsewhere and in a way, when Ricœur decides to drop the vocabulary of reference and substitute it for “redescription” in *Time and Narrative*, he already loses most of that radicality (this is something that has been argued by George H. Taylor). Accordingly, the most interesting and radical of Ricœur’s attempts at developing a Critical Theory is to be found precisely in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, and these are unparalleled elsewhere. Indeed, without the efforts of George H. Taylor, this immensely valuable writing would probably have been left unpublished for many years.

With these remarks I do not wish to claim that Ricœur’s position lost in insight throughout the years, or that he just adopted conservative positions. In fact, nothing could be further from the truth and as Pierre-Olivier Monteil¹⁶⁵¹ argued, there is a continuity of a political project underlying Ricœur’s philosophy, and this is a project from which a Critical Theory can draw many elements. For instance, as Monteil claims, we can find in Ricœur a critique of capitalism and market domination. Furthermore, and to reiterate, it is in the later years that Ricœur fully embraced his position of the “philosophe dans la cité” as Dosse argues, and some of his most interesting claims for the development of a political and social philosophy, or a Critical Theory, are to be found in these years (the distinction between power in common and power over, the emphasis on indignation and recognition, and so forth).

¹⁶⁵⁰ See Johann Michel, *Paul Ricœur, une philosophie de l’agir humain, op. cit.*, pp. 384-394.

¹⁶⁵¹ See Pierre-Olivier Monteil, “Paul Ricœur. Variations et continuités d’un projet politique” in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies* 4/1 (2013): 170-183.

Be that as it may, my critical remarks are here to show that these tensions and slight discrepancies in Ricœur's thought *do* exist and that there is no point in hiding them. As such, even though Ricœur's intellectual production and life command immense respect, because no official Ricoeurian "school" exists (and he would probably have preferred to keep it that way) and since his thought is so complex, multi-layered and allows for so many different possibilities, I think that in being inspired by his philosophy it is important to read him properly. And this means that even though we can try to present his philosophy in the more exhaustive way we are capable of (and this is what I tried to do through the notion of conflict, and its ultimate dialectic with conciliation), and also to rationally reconstruct the main movement guiding it, we should recognize the crossroads in which he sometimes was. As such, depending on the nature of the project we want to develop further, it is important to choose the right paths in these crossroads.

For me, thus, choosing the right path in here means following the path of critique when putting forward what I think is a Ricoeurian inspired project of social philosophy. As such, and from my own limited standpoint, how critical is Ricœur's Critical Theory? It depends on the particular features of his work that we wish to emphasize. If we follow the account provided in "Science and Ideology", it is inevitable to conclude that by "criticizing critique" his standpoint is lacking both in radicality and in critical attitude. Likewise, if we choose to emphasize the practical aspects of consenting to necessity (for instance, those of *Freedom and Nature*), it is also very likely that the result is some sort of political and philosophical Quietism.

But it goes without saying that if we choose to emphasize other aspects in Ricœur's philosophy, the result will be very different. We can possibly find in it a very critical, and very useful Critical Theory, if we choose to read Ricœur emphasizing the following elements: human agency, the capacity to devise practical projects as our aim for the good life, the depiction of power in common and the novelty of human action, the rights to capabilities and to recognition, the right to indignation as a moral compass, thick descriptions of intersubjective ethical lives coupled with a strong normative content, basic metaphoricity and the productive power of utopia. If we choose *these* elements in Ricœur's philosophy, then we can see in him a radically powerful thought, capable of founding an informed practical philosophy with many possible fertile developments in ethics,

political philosophy, social philosophy, and Critical Theory. This is the path I choose to follow, within Ricoeurian philosophy. I am pretty sure it is not the only possible one. Far from it. But it is ultimately the path that makes Ricoeurian philosophy useful for my own purposes. In the few pages I have left in this dissertation, allow me to spell out in a very brief manner what this amounts to.

Part Eight

Towards a Renewed Hermeneutic Social Philosophy

In the pages that follow, besides spelling out my proposal, I will try to illustrate in a very brief manner in what way social philosophy can draw from hermeneutics and I will also try to provide some provisional answers as to the status and importance of social philosophy. I will argue that hermeneutics is useful in *making sense of the social*¹⁶⁵² and also how it can found a social philosophy. We have seen in parts one and two some of Kant's, Hegel's, Marx's and Honneth's contributions to social philosophy, and I think part four sufficiently determined how Ricoeurian hermeneutics works. As such, I will not repeat these analyzes and will instead only add a few traits to the definition of social philosophy, and recap some of the elements of Ricoeurian hermeneutics that can fit in this project.

¹⁶⁵² In the following pages I reproduce, in a modified manner, some parts of the article "Making Sense of the Social" previously published in *Études Ricoeuriennes / Ricœur Studies*. See Gonçalo Marcelo, "Making Sense of the Social. Hermeneutics and Social Philosophy", *op. cit.*

8.1 – Making Sense and Transforming the Social

My aim is to investigate what relation, if any, hermeneutics can have with what we call “social philosophy”, understood as the branch of practical philosophy that deals with the description of everyday practices of living communities and with the normative project of liberation through critique. The problematic can be stated as follows: is hermeneutics an appropriate tool to understand the social world? If it is, will it also be a sufficient and sound basis to found a social philosophy in the aforementioned sense? My working hypotheses will be that 1) hermeneutics is indeed a pre-condition to social philosophy but that 2) it is in itself insufficient to fulfill all the tasks that a social philosophy sets for itself. In a nutshell, I contend that a hermeneutical methodology will be an interesting point of departure to *making sense* of the social, although it is ultimately an insufficient way to radically transform social reality. As a result, all social philosophy, if it is not to become a purely constructionist and abstract project, must start with hermeneutics but, if it is to fulfill its emancipatory agenda, must go beyond it.

Recently, we have seen a rehabilitation of “social philosophy” as a specific discipline, separate both from political philosophy and sociology. For some readers, it might be surprising that it be so. What could a social philosophy be, after the emancipation of sociology from philosophy? In his *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale*, Franck Fischbach defines social philosophy as an interdisciplinary effort, drawing from the insights of the social sciences and philosophy alike.¹⁶⁵³ It is still a branch of philosophy, different from sociology (even from theoretical sociology) in that it has a strictly conceptual (and sometimes normative and transformative) aim. As a result, the concepts stemming from social philosophy are prone to be more general and encompassing in their scope, and less precise in their empirical applications than those which are specifically sociological. Nonetheless, social philosophy puts forward concepts that can be put to the test in more refined sociological analyzes. If these, in turn, transform and expand the original concept, a more enriched social philosophy will likely ensue. It can therefore be argued that social philosophy, with the help of a hermeneutical approach, might provide an interesting theoretical framework that

¹⁶⁵³ See Franck Fischbach, *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale* (Paris: Éditions La Découverte, 2009).

could be taken up and further elaborated by sociologists. Fischbach further claims that the difference between classical political philosophy and social philosophy is that the latter does not presuppose individuals as being purely autonomous and rational agents, naturally capable of providing themselves with the means of their own existence. Instead, it takes individuals to be intersubjectively constituted fragile beings of needs and feelings, capable of *social suffering*.¹⁶⁵⁴ As we can see, this is not very different from Ricœur's own account, at least the one we find in *Oneself as Another* and *The Course of Recognition*.

Another key feature of social philosophy is the tendency to use an organic metaphor to describe societies in terms of health or pathologies. Social philosophy, pursuing this medical metaphor, tends to produce diagnoses of social life. Consistent with the Critical Theory tradition, Honneth, as we have seen in part two, sometimes examines societies in terms of the *social* pathologies that their patterns of social reproduction and organization can foster, pathologies that prevent a successful human flourishing. This task is also taken up by Ricœur, insofar as, for instance, reified forms of ideology (and also utopia) are, as we have seen above, taken to be social pathologies. As such, and at least in a certain interpretation, Ricœur's project of a critical hermeneutics (if read by emphasizing the elements I listed in the last chapter) can be connected in a productive manner with the Marxist-Hegelian notion of immanent critique, such as it is practiced by Honneth, and others.

This type of critique is not inherently normative, in the sense that what we are dealing with are not abstract ideals, the best sets of norms or practices imagined under a veil of ignorance or something of the sort, regardless of the concrete set of practices and norms already existing in concrete societies and communities. To reiterate, for this strand of Critical Theory, rules do not appear out of nowhere. There is no "view from above" or even liberal "neutrality". Instead, societies are taken as they are, and their contradictions are exploited in a way that makes possible for them to be at the same time understood and overcome. This critique has, it can be argued, a twofold objective. First, it aims at detecting the main traditions that make up the ethical lives of communities; it is an investigation into the *Sittlichkeit* of peoples. Thus, the norms that are pertinent to

¹⁶⁵⁴ Fischbach, *Manifeste pour une philosophie sociale*, p. 50. See also Emmanuel Renault, *Souffrances Sociales*, *op. cit.*

this sort of investigation are the rules that already are in some way institutionalized, if not in formal law, at least in the current everyday practices of intersubjective interaction. What becomes important is to understand why rules and practices already have a certain degree of normative stability in a given community. As we have seen in part two, this is the type of path ultimately chosen by Honneth, Walzer and, at least in one interpretation, Ricœur. It is the path of social criticism to which Walzer calls “Interpretation” and Honneth “Reconstruction”. It also comes very close to what Ricœur calls “restorative critique” or the “recollection of meaning”. However, it is also very important to emphasize that this is only a *first step*, because the second step is a ruthless critique of the point of departure, as I argued above. In other words, we need a yardstick.

Again, this is close to Honneth’s version of Critical Theory. In presenting his claim, Honneth argues that what we must add is a left-Hegelian premise of development and progress¹⁶⁵⁵; at each new level of social reproduction reason must present itself in a more developed form. Thus, in each society, the immanent ideals chosen must be those that represent the most developed form of social rationalization. If a given society has available, among its guiding ideals, an ideal that can be shown to embody a higher form of rationalization or, to borrow a better concept, a more developed stage of moral progress, we have found the yardstick that we can use to criticize and transform reality. This also involves, as I argued in the last chapter, using the critical standpoint to attack the point of departure; deepen the distancing; and if needed, transform it completely.

With the Honnethian definition of reconstructive social criticism, understood as this hybrid between the hermeneutical recovery of immanent values and norms, and the teleological tendency towards rationality, we come closer to understanding how hermeneutics and a project of social philosophy might be intrinsically connected. The striving towards a progressive rationalization points toward the goal of emancipation inherent in all critical theory; and the way immanent values are recovered is always to be rooted in a hermeneutical procedure, even if we presuppose its left-Hegelian complement.

¹⁶⁵⁵ See Honneth, “Reconstructive Social Criticism with a Genealogical Proviso”, *op. cit.*

Now, how can Ricœur's hermeneutical project be of use here? Firstly, we find in it both hermeneutics as recollection of meaning (useful for understanding the point of departure) and hermeneutics of suspicion (useful for criticizing that point of departure and, by deepening distanciation, radically transform it, if needed). Secondly, Ricœur's account of ipseities, his confidence that these can be applied to collective identities and, furthermore, that these are narrative and thus constitutively changing and non-reified identities, provides us with a supple model to both attest the existence of these identities (thus being able to ontologically ground their claims for recognition) and allow for innovation to meaningfully transform tradition and keep them evolving. Finally, his notion of utopia is, to reiterate, invaluable for the making of our meaningful transformative projects.

Thus a critical hermeneutics, if it is to succeed, must be able to fulfill all the tasks we have been describing up until now: recognition of the historical character of existing societies, identification of the core values that make up their symbolic orders, evaluation of the fairness of these orders, genealogy of their values and verification of the right application of each value in the existing social order (as well as the significant shifts of meaning that the value has undergone in its evolution) and finally, when confronted with unambiguous unjust social orders, formulation of sharp critiques able to bring about better symbolic orders that could foster societies that would be fairer and more decent. This is a tremendously demanding task. But if a critical hermeneutics were to fulfill, even partially, these tasks, it would make the transformative interest of social philosophy much more viable, because "immanent critique" would be provided with the necessary tools to really make explicit the immanent sense it is trying to grasp.

And ultimately, as is evident, the practice of transformation calls for more than just interpretation. Let me recuperate a somewhat old-fashioned but perhaps still pertinent formula, according to which praxis must walk alongside theory. The practice of transformation calls for more than interpretation. It is just a *terminus a quo* whose *terminus ad quem* might be the partial fulfilling of a very specific ought, the *utopian ought*, as George Taylor recently called it.¹⁶⁵⁶ That is, going from interpretation to action, to social praxis. But for now, allow me to still

¹⁶⁵⁶ George Taylor, "Delineations in Ricœur's Concept of Utopia", unpublished conference delivered at the *International Conference on Ricœur Studies: New Perspectives on Hermeneutics in the Social Sciences and Practical Philosophy* (September 16 2011, Moscow, Russia).

emphasize the only missing element of this puzzle. I have been highlighting the need to deepen the pole of critique. And throughout many places in this dissertation – firstly in my analysis of the Greek cultural source, secondly in my incursion in Critical Theory in part two, mainly in the early efforts of Adorno and Horkheimer – I invoked the particular mix of rationality and irrationality, and the project of a critique of reason. In the last chapter of this thesis what I want to put forward is what a critique of reason could look like today.

8.2 – The Need for a New Critique of Reason

The title of this section might seem somewhat pompous, if not anachronistic. Why should we, in our own allegedly post-metaphysical day and age, speak about “reason” and call for a critique of such an entity? Is there not the risk of a hypostatization of a given faculty – something like Nietzsche’s famous *virtus dormitiva* – and should not an entirely deflationary approach be preferable? Is there really something such as “reason”? And if there is, after Kant, Adorno, Sartre, Sloterdijk, Habermas, Honneth, and so many others, was this “reason” not lambasted enough? Why not give it a rest? Why should we come back to it, after all?

I concede that these are possible questions, and some of them are even pertinent. However, allow me, after the very long mediation of this thesis, to put forward a claim to which I can only hint at as an intuition, and not fully ground or explicate. As such, this chapter will be the part of this dissertation that points towards the future, rather than the past. The future of a research to follow, if time and my capacities allow it. I include here a tentative first approach of it because I see it as being a continuation and indeed a segment of a hermeneutic social philosophy as I defined it in the last chapter, and because in order to put forward such a project, I am taking for granted many of the contributions of authors such as Ricœur, Honneth, Habermas, Charles Taylor, Arendt, and so many others we have seen in the five first parts of this work.

Indeed, I do think that in our own day a new critique of reason is called for; that these notions are not depleted yet and that indeed they must be renewed. I propose to characterize the prevalent, widespread manifestation of reason today as being a “miserable” reason but without, however, this feature fully being acknowledged as such. Consequently, a “critique of miserable reason” is also a critique which aims at freeing it from its misery. Whether or not this task is at least partially realizable, I do not know. But this should not prevent us to spell out our claims.

8.2.1 – The Critique of Miserable Reason

Firstly, what is “reason” and why should we come back to it? I see reason as a human faculty, one in which radically positive potentialities are intrinsically tied up with also radically negative perversions. This is, more or less, what Ricœur detected in the use of political power in his famous “political paradox”, which I mentioned many times in this dissertation. As Foucault noticed, the use of reason is intrinsically connected with the use of power and its putative abuses. Moreover, as we saw already in the Greek source (recall Dodd’s analysis of the first chapter) and with renewed vigor in the *Dialectic of Enlightenment* proposed by Adorno and Horkheimer, the use of reason, or rationality, can lead to violence or even be intrinsically connected with it – control of inner and outer nature, domination of other people, and so forth.

If it is true that this is a faculty, one which we can exercise in different manners, it is also a radically intersubjective one. Ricœur’s and Honneth’s philosophical anthropologies, coupled with what we have learned with developmental psychology, show us how radically embedded in thick webs of intersubjective relations our own identities are. If acting rationally is many times tantamount to acting in a purposive manner, acting with an end in mind, the way this ideal is embedded in us certainly comes from intersubjective sources; and our use of it in different manners certainly also finds in intersubjectivity a privileged domain of application (whether good or bad).

Consequently, allow me to treat reason as a historical transcendental. That is, it is transcendental because it is what allows our conditions of experience and action in the world, as Kant saw. But it is not entirely a priori, and its concrete instantiation (even in biological, evolutionary terms) is certainly subject to change and in many aspects it is also context-bound, since different instantiations of what it might mean to “act rationally” acquire different meanings in different cultures.

Allow me also to admit that even though reason as a faculty has obviously been used in different ways and in different societies throughout history, there is at least one strong sense of it that is intrinsically connected with what came to be known as “Modernity”. Admittedly, at least in some versions, this is also related with the Enlightenment project, as it came to embody an ideal of emancipation and, furthermore, one with a potentially “universal” and context-

transcending force.

It goes with saying that this capacity to attain universal validity has been attacked over and over again, and even the project of emancipation might be put into question. Why emancipation, and emancipation of whom and from what?, might we ask. “Reason” itself is sometimes seen as an offspring of Western cultural forms, as is universalism (in the many forms it assumes, such as, for instance, the defense of human rights).

I will refrain from tackling the problem of universalism in this brief section. Perhaps specific values with inbuilt universal claims are only inchoate universals in search for recognition, as Ricœur sometimes argued. And maybe the project of reason, in the dominant forms we know here in the North Atlantic, is indeed an offspring of the West. Its alleged contingency and specific origin do not, in my opinion, curtail its potential validity.

But if indeed there is a form of rationalization specific to our own culture – and of course nowadays pervasively invading into other cultures and life forms, because of globalization and its wide-reaching effects – and if this form was partially embodied in the cultural project of the Enlightenment, I want to reiterate that this is a project which contains radically different and indeed contradictory possibilities within itself.

In one of its forms, Modernity and its rationalization procedures were seen as a putative liberation from oppressive traditions – even if not all traditions are oppressing, as Gadamer, Ricœur, Walzer and Taylor show –, from unjust authority. It was also seen as a project of progress, and of a radical belief that in many areas evolution was indeed possible. If we take Marx’s philosophy as being one of the offshoots of this belief, emancipation – at least in his project – was not only from tradition but from economic and social exploitation. Foucault carries this project further with his denunciation of the micro-physics of power. Certainly, many of these authors do not recognize themselves as pursuing a project of Enlightenment, or of Modernity. Indeed, through proposals of radical rethinking of these processes, Lyotard and others proposed to start speaking about “Post-Modernity” or other such configurations; many of their efforts are directed precisely at denouncing and criticizing the abuses of these notions: Modernity, Enlightenment, Reason...

And yet through their critiques and denunciations of pathological forms

of rationality, domination, abuse of power and so forth, it can be argued that what they are denouncing are perverse, distorted aspects of these phenomena. But that, at the same time, we do not need to completely lose faith in reason, in the possibilities of emancipation and so forth, just because distorted phenomena exist. As Ricœur argued for ideology and utopia, so we might also argue for reason: a social philosopher must be able to distinguish the positive (here I dare not speak of a “constitutive” function) from the perverted and distorted phenomena. Because if reason can indeed give birth to different, and contradictory, possibilities, what we have to do is to learn how to find the positive possibilities and to use them to denounce and criticize the perverted ones. Again, when Habermas states that there are a plurality of interests of reason, and that even though there are uses of reason leading to instrumental action, these do not necessarily completely occlude other potentialities, such as the interest in emancipation and in communicative action, he is not saying something very different from what I am arguing here.

Consequently, the effort I am undertaking here, as stated before, can be seen as adhering to and renewing a project of Critical Theory. And this because I believe, like critical theorists, that it is by exercising critique that we will find the yardstick with which we will distinguish positive from negative uses of reason. It will be through that diagnosis that we will aim at delimiting the uses of reason and put forward alternatives which will also serve to underpin normative ideals contained in potential uses of reason.

Accordingly, if there are indeed contradictory uses of reason, and if reason is a historical transcendental subject to change, the historical forms it assumes are also dependent on the enforcement of interpretations and the influence of social practices. As such, at any given moment, a social practice might have the upper hand and become dominant, without however the need for us to believe that things will always be as they are right now, without alternatives being conceivable. This is tantamount to Ricœur’s distinction between constitutive and pathological forms of ideology as the constitutive powers of the social imaginary. The fact that a certain use of reason becomes socially dominant at any given time does not mean that through critique (indeed, sometimes through *conflicts of interpretations*) social actors cannot change something in the way practices are conceived.

With these introductory notes laid out, I can proceed to a brief diagnosis

of what, to me, seems the dominant use of reason in our own day. Allow me to start by making a methodological distinction between more theoretical and more practical uses of reason (without however pretending to establish a strict division between these two uses). In the theoretical level, as Kant argued, we are moved by the question *what can we know*, and what are the procedures used to determine the answers to that question. In the practical level, by contrast, what is at stake is both a description of our capacities, and a normative questioning: *what can or should we do*. And it seems to me that in both levels, we are nowadays faced with the risk of a possible imposition of several types of reductionism.

In the theoretical level, the prestige of the natural sciences – which is not, in itself, a negative phenomenon – sometimes risks eliminating the possibility of concurrent explanatory procedures, at different levels; as such, the social and human sciences can sometimes fall prey to a certain colonization (to use Habermas’s vocabulary) of the natural sciences; this is evident even in the terminology used to describe what “researchers” in what used to be called the humanities are now supposed to do in their “labs”. This type of reductionism can perhaps go by the name of scientism, and its effects are not only epistemological (a tendency to favor only one type of explanation) but also social (“research” funds canalized almost exclusively to the “hard” sciences, and so on).

In the practical level, where the question of how we should live our lives appears, we must also be attentive to the patterns of social organization around us; i.e., what are the meaningful values which orient our practices, and how people are actually living their lives (as such, this is not merely an individual, but really a social question). And besides the many values put forward by our existing traditions and institutions (such as religious or ethical values) a particular attention needs to be shed on the role economics has come to play in contemporary societies and in their organization. This means, simply put, that any attempt to ask questions about how we should orient our lives in society cannot avoid posing questions about the form of economic organization that became dominant in the last centuries. As Boltanski and Chiapello have shown, and of course Weber before them, capitalism is not only a set of practices guiding economic organization, production and work; it is also a set of ideals and justifications, with its specific, ever-changing values. And because we simply cannot choose to live, as it were, completely outside capitalism, we cannot avoid questioning it.

And again, inside capitalism, it is difficult to avoid the diagnosis according to which, at least in the last few decades, and with a particular force felt in the West, the specific form of organization and the set of ideals and practices put forward is one that has been called “neo-liberalism” with its current features of market deregulation, growth of the financial sector over and above the other sectors, and so forth. This dominance of the prestige associated with economics, the emphasis put on capitalism as the natural and unavoidable system of economic coordination – after all, socialism did fail spectacularly in the 20th Century – and even the new techniques of management so well analyzed by Boltanski and Chiapello all concur in showing that one of the dominant set of values in our societies, perhaps even more than in the past, are what came to be known as the values of the *homo economicus*. What exactly these values are, can be a subject of contention. But one usually identifies self-interest, or greed as some of them; other times, even manipulation, or at least maximization of expected utility and / or *efficiency*, that all-encompassing value, used to exert pressure on people at different times and in different contexts.

And if this is true – or even if it is not in every case, let us take it as an ideal type –, can we not find in the behavior of economic agents in the market, those driven by these strong motivational bases: profit, (eventually greed, and so forth) what could maybe be described as an *insatiable thirst*, a situation of bad infinity? Moreover, as we have seen with Walzer in part two, in our countries of the North Atlantic, today, the greatest danger of domination is not the political one, as we, fortunately, live in liberal, democratic societies; rather, it is the danger of domination of money over any other social goods; and the risk is aggravated when inequalities are higher. Today, the invasion of the market sphere (and of private interests) over the public and political spheres is taken to be undisputable, as is the commodification of what, until recently, we held to be priceless goods. The prestige of money, and of those who can control it or own it more than others do, is almost infinite. Furthermore, a set of beliefs associated in recent years with mathematical and statistical models used to assess risk in market transactions, and to predict economic growth at a macroeconomic level also eventually concurred to lead some people to believe that the theory of economic cycles had been proven wrong, that economic growth could carry on indefinitely, and that risk behavior in the marketplace could virtually be rewarded the overwhelming majority of the

time, provided that the right models (the *value at risk* model, devised by JP Morgan in the 1990s, was popular for some time) for assessing risk were used.

And yet, the recent events in the U.S.A. and in Europe proved that all these certainties could fail, and that the possibility of an economic, financial and social crisis was indeed very real. When the subprime crisis became apparent in the U.S.A. and when, in turn, European policy shifted from growth stimulus to austerity, in the name of debt sustainability and allegedly rational measures, the degree of social suffering increased dramatically in the countries affected by these measures. The question thus begs to be asked: what rationality, and for what purposes?

My claim is thus that we are trapped in a situation of bad infinity that results in a contemporary figure of the unhappy consciousness. And this because we are conflicted, torn in different directions by opposing imperatives, both of which seem to stem from rational demands. At an individual level, people are encouraged to seek success, to thrive, attain recognition, status and, most of all, money. At a societal level, and after a frenzy of spending, many sovereign states see themselves trapped in spirals of austerity which lead to a height in unemployment, economic inequality, and increasing degrees of social suffering. Amid this situation, it is the social bond that becomes threatened, since the conditions of solidarity seem to be severely curtailed. As such, in many places, the exercise of an alleged rationality (and even efficiency), leads people to a state of misery, in the double sense of the word: unhappiness and poverty, because both their material conditions and the possibilities of approximating their horizons of expectations and their spaces of experience are threatened.

As such, the exercise of rationality risks throwing us in a situation of double misery. The exercise of reason, in its dominant economic form, and the risks it entails, is, at least in this interpretation, an exercise of miserable reason. And this because neo-liberalism, deregulation, and the threats they pose to the social well-being and harmony of societies when inequality rises, can have serious consequences. And these can, in turn, have ethical (we risk not grasping alternative values, leading to different practices), psychological and economic effects.

These are, partly, the consequences of the development of a group of tendencies already contained in Modernity, with its emphasis on the exploration of

technique, competence, individualism and pursuit of self-interest, namely in the marketplace. However, what I want to argue is that there are different ethical and social alternatives and while it is not clear that these could lead to a different type of economic organization (socialism and communism have failed in their historical instantiations, and other alternatives, such as the so-called “economy of the gift” are not modes of economic coordination capable of offering an alternative to capitalism) they can at least be the touchstone for a critique of miserable reason. This critique, if not anything else, can at least serve as a denunciation of the pathological forms of social organization (economic or otherwise) and to envisage, as it were, partial and localized remedies for it.

Today, it thus seems that the task of the critique of reason is one of imposing limits to the dominance of money, like Walzer claims, of denouncing the contemporary forms of domination¹⁶⁵⁷ and of trying to conceive perhaps modest but effective “real utopias”¹⁶⁵⁸ which would allow us to change some aspects of the ways in which societies are organized and our lives are lived. In so doing, and by engaging in a process of a conflict of interpretations about what is really important in society, perhaps it will succeed in freeing up other, more positive, “interests of reason”, such as those which found the social bond, our “desire to live well with and for others in just institutions”, as Ricœur would put it.

This critique of miserable reason, if successfully undertaken, would therefore amount to the spelling out of a practical philosophy that would strive to do justice to the neglected possibilities of human action. I am still not in a position to fully articulate such a critique, let alone its positive outcome. But I do feel it is an urgent task.

¹⁶⁵⁷ On these many and widespread forms, see Béatrice Hibou, *Anatomie politique de la domination* (Paris: La Découverte, 2011).

¹⁶⁵⁸ See Erik Olin Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, *op. cit.*

Conclusion

Ricoeurian Philosophy After Ricœur

Every conclusion is fragile and provisional. It is, as such, a temporary closure, a petrification of what is in itself a dynamic process of thought. A book, or in this case a dissertation, comes to a stop after a complex maze of crisscrossing interpretations. Consequently, it is given a specific form, and from the moment writing stops and is offered to the readers, it escapes any little control its author might want to have over it. But this only means that closure is never absolute.

With this dissertation, I hope to have sufficiently proven that conflict plays an essential role in the history of philosophy, in the thought of Paul Ricœur, and in contemporary debates in ethics, political philosophy and social philosophy. Throughout these chapters, it has been argued that even though conflict can be, *prima facie*, a negative phenomenon it can also, in turn, have positive and fertile aspects. Conflicts can have a disclosing power. For instance, of the normativity of rules, as Hunyadi argues. Conflicts of interpretations can contribute to the enlargement of our perspective, as I also claimed many times. And they can lead to better practical outcomes, as in successful struggles for recognition at a societal level.

From the reading of these pages, it should have become clear that conflict has a wide array of intersecting significations. These are organized in several semantic fields which partially overlap, but that we can distinguish through analysis. Assuming that this undertaking was at least partially successful, it should have provided an historical reminder of the importance of conflict in philosophy, and also of the need to take it into account in our own day and age. It is by now clear that I adopted a transhistorical approach and a mixed strategy of historical reconstruction and conceptual clarification, not very far from the ones put forward by Charles Taylor in *Sources of the Self* and Ricœur in *The Course of Recognition*.

Depending on the semantic field within which we position ourselves, conflict can thus be seen as structuring reality, or at least social interaction. And even if we fall short from accepting an overarching conflict theory, I think one of the undisputable conclusions of this study, at least if one is to recognize some

merit in it, is that conflicts do exist (at least in the hermeneutical, social and political level) and that to ignore them or choose not to address them results in a severe occlusion of a meaningful part of our world. Therefore, any strategy of depiction of the social world, and of our way to orient ourselves within it, must at least recognize this fact, or else run the risk of providing a fully detached and as it were probably merely idealized version of it. If this recognition is a starting point, the next step in the strategy will probably be the one of assessing their treatability.

As I see it, we cannot be conflictual about everything. We need to discern good from bad conflicts, and learn to reject the latter in the name of the former. This is why many authors, and Ricœur among them, try to devise ways to transform conflicts, to make them dialectical and productive – such as, for instance, Ricœur’s moral judgment in situation as a response to the conflict of duties. As Ricœur, I also think that we need to live in pacified societies. But I deem it preferable to live in conflictual societies which, through their own conflictual evolution, tend to moral progress, than in unjustly reified anomic societies where there is peace, but there is also silent injustice.

Conflict does not have to be, and perhaps should really not be, an end in itself. But it can be an appropriate mean to attain positive ends. Political struggles, for instance, can lead to the enforcement of rights. And conflicts of interpretations can disclose the meaningful alternatives to situations where the There Is No Alternative discourse impinges upon us. I believe that we always act under the implicit guidance of normative backgrounds; that we need rules and ideals to guide our action. And that, as Hunyadi suggests, these rules are not eternal; that indeed they sprout, like Walzer argues, from our meaningful already-constituted traditions. But because they are not eternal they can be changed and must indeed be so, if they are proven to be unjust.

Consequently, in order for change to be brought about in society, we need a yardstick. But this yardstick can come from nowhere else than the procedure of critique, through distanciation, and through conflicts of interpretations. This is, indeed, one of the applications of a hermeneutical practical philosophy. And in order to undertake such a massive endeavor, one of the tasks it needs to fulfill is a critique of reason, which I today see as being a “miserable reason” which leads to two reductionisms: a theoretical one, which reduces reason to its techno-scientific use; and a practical reductionism, which only sees human action as being moved

by self-interested reasons. The result of these two reductionisms combined is the silencing of alternative forms of human reason; it is a poor theoretical construction and it can lead to an unhappy consciousness since it can be self-defeating, and because it can ultimately lead to a destruction of the intersubjective social bond.

But given that this is a dissertation on Ricœur, inspired by Ricœur, even if it engages in so many other discussions, allow me to end with a Ricoeurian tone. As I stated at the outset of this investigation, the corpus of Ricœur's works is now simultaneously closed and open. Closed because he stopped writing, open because previously unknown or very rare writings keep being published and, perhaps even more importantly, the reception of his works keeps growing in scope. As I also argued, one can be inspired by Ricœur while at the same time criticizing some points of his philosophy, or choosing to follow slightly different paths. My own proposal put forward in this dissertation, as is clear, is halfway between "Ricoeurianism" and Critical Theory. The diagnosis of a "miserable reason" risks leaving the courageous reader who has accompanied me in this lengthy trajectory with a slight pessimistic impression. But nothing could be further from my intentions. For only by acknowledging and confronting the hardship of reality can we come up with the meaningful alternatives for transforming it. Because, ultimately, our attitude is none other than that of saying yes to a world that says no... *L'homme est la joie du oui dans la tristesse du fini.*

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